

THE SIKH IDEOLOGY

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BY

DALJIT SINGH

PREFACE

This small volume, apart from having a brief introduction on the methodology of comparative study of religion, comprises an essay on a comparison of Sikhism, Vaisnavism, Nathism and Sant Tradition (Radical Bhagats). Parts of this essay include contents of lectures delivered at the Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, the Punjabi University, Patiala, and the Guru Nanak Foundation, New Delhi.

Despite a large body of recent literature on the lives of the Gurus, Gurbani and other aspects of the Sikh Religion and history, there still persists, in some quarters, ignorance or misunderstanding about the essentials of Sikh Religion and the message of the Sikh Gurus. It is still not uncommon for persons, even from among scholars, to say that Sikhism is a part and parcel of the Indian Bhakti movement; or that its doctrines are very much akin to those of the Nath Yogis, or the Radical Bhagats. While it is true that hymns of some of the Bhagats expressing devotion to God have been included in the Guru Granth Sahib, it should not be taken to mean that the Sikh ideology is a part or the product of the Bhakti movement.

In this volume we seek to give a comparative picture of the fundamentals of Sikhism and the principles and practices of the three other religious systems with which Sikhism is believed to have basic affinities. Our study reveals that this belief is quite erroneous.

In recent years some interested or pseudo literature has appeared which seeks to give a distorted view of Sikhism. It has been said that Guru Nanak made new contribution to the religious thought of India; or that there is gap between the

teachings of Guru Nanak and Guru Granth Sahib on the one hand, and those of Guru Gobind Singh on the other hand; or that the Singh Sabha Movement gave an entirely new trend or interpretation to the Sikh religion.

It is common that during the period of a disturbed political climate such motivated literature should appear. Our analysis of the four systems shows that, apart from Sikhism being a revealed religion, independent in its identity, there was no trace of the fundamentals of the Sikh Religion in any of the earlier religious traditions. Guru Nanak completely changed the trend of religious life in India. Against the world being regarded as Maya, Mithya (illusion), or a place of suffering or misery, he called it real and meaningful. Against life-negation and consequent withdrawal into asceticism or monasticism, he recommended life affirmation and full and virtuous participation in the affairs of life. Against celibacy and the down graded position of women, he recommended a householder's life and equality to women. Against the withdrawal of Sanyasis, recluses, and Yogis, he proclaimed that he knows the way who works and shares his earnings with others. Against the general acceptance of the hierarchical caste ideology and the concept of pollution, he preached and practised the equality of man. Against a clear dichotomy between the religious life and the empirical life of man, he made an inalienable combination between the two, and wanted the Sikhs to accept not only participation but also total social responsibility in all spheres of life. We are not aware of any religion in India or the East having done that or proclaimed that the way to be a Sachara or true man is to carry out the Attributive Will of God, or that higher than truth is truthful living. Infact, nothing could be more radical and revolutionary than what Guru Nanak and the Sikh Gurus did.

It is hoped that this small volume will help to dispel misconceptions concerning Sikhism.

It was very kind of the Guru Nanak Foundation, New Delhi, to have published, the first edition of this volume. I am

deeply grateful to the Sikh Missionary Society, Southall, (U.K.) for agreeing to take up the publication of the second edition of this book.

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CHAPTER I

METHODOLOGY OF COMPARATIVE STUDY

Comparative studies of religion are essential both for the proper appreciation of any religion and its features, and more specially for identifying the reasons for the wide varieties of religious doctrines and developments in the world. No doubt, the environmental situation and the social milieu in which a religion arises, do have their impact on its growth and the problems it seeks to tackle. Yet, it is very true that the perceptions, the internal strength, and the ideology of a religion are fundamentally the elements that give it substance and direction, and shape its personality.

Unless some definite principles are followed in making a comparative study of different religious systems, confusions, misunderstandings and misinterpretations are bound to occur, in the presentation thereof. The important thing hence is to identify and compare the fundamentals and the essentials of different systems. Otherwise, similarities or dissimilarities in the ancillary or peripheral features of the two systems could be very misleading and give an entirely lopsided view of the traditions concerned.

The following could be the basic issues on which it is necessary to ascertain and compare the answers of a system before arriving at any conclusion regarding its affinities, nature, class and stand.

1. THE METAPHYSICAL VIEW

While it is true that a religious system is not a philosophy, yet its metaphysical assumptions and its views about the nature of Reality, so often determine its other basic characteristics and its approach to the world. For example, in Yoga, Sankhya and Jainism, two kinds of Reality, material and spiritual, are assumed, and man is a combination of both. No one basic Reality, much less a creative Reality of God, is assumed. The logic of such Dualism, therefore, involves, the isolation of the spiritual monad from its connection or combination with the material element. Thus, in each case, the ideal is of withdrawal from the world and its activities without any role for the ideal man. In the same manner, in the monistic system of Sankara, the world and its activities are Mithya or unreal. Therefore, monasticism or the virtual turning of the back to the world becomes necessary. Similarly, in a pantheistic system, moral life ceases to have a spiritual or primary value. Accordingly, the metaphysical assumptions of a religious system have a significant relevance for understanding a system and its character.

2. NATURE OF REALITY

The nature of reality assumed by the tradition has also a crucial meaning. In case the Reality is attributive, world activity and moral life assume a primary and spiritual significance. Similar is the importance of the issue whether Reality is both Transcendent and Immanent. But, far more important is the assumption whether Reality is creative or not. For in a materialistic or deterministic system, creativity and freedom have not much of a place, or scope.

3. REALITY OF THE WORLD

Answer to this issue makes all the difference between a system like Sankara's Vedanta where the world is Mithya, or unreal and a system like Sikhism or Islam, where the creation is not only real but creative activity in the world is essential for

the spiritual growth of man. The systems of the former kind recommend monasticism, involving withdrawal from life, whereas in the latter kind world affirmation becomes an essential feature.

4. IS WORLD WORTHWHILE ?

So far as approach to the world is concerned, this is a very important issue dividing all systems into two categories, one of life-affirmation and the other of life-negation. For example, in Buddhism, world is a place of suffering. Salvation lies only in Nirvana through asceticism and withdrawal from life. Moral life could give one a better birth than before, but it could never lead to Nirvana. Similarly, in systems like Yoga, Nathism and some categories of Saivism, world is a place of misery. In Jainism, too, world activity, howsoever good or moral, is an involvement and has to be given up. As against that, in Sikhism, Christianity and Islam, creative activity in the world, or activity in carrying out the Will of God, is of the highest spiritual significance. As such, the world is a meaningful place for spiritual endeavours. It is far from being a place of suffering or misery, which has to be given up or from which release has to be sought. In fact, in systems like Sikhism, the entire growth of man and his spiritual stature are judged by the deeds performed by him in this world. Actually, divergent answers on this issue would place two systems entirely into widely varying categories of religious systems.

5. GOAL OF LIFE

For obvious reasons, the goal fixed in a religious system is of fundamental significance. For, this determines in many ways its entire direction and world view, its values, and its methodology and discipline. Here, too, whatever, be the apparent similarities between the two traditions, these would be meaningless if the systems have opposing spiritual goals. In Sikhism, the goal is to carry out, through deeds, the attributive and the creative Will of God. It can have nothing in common

with a system, like Yoga or Sankhya, where no God is assumed and where the goal is the isolation of the spiritual element from the material element. Actually, the spiritual goal in a religion determines not only its entire approach towards life, but also its ethics and the role of the superman. For example, religious systems in which the goal is isolation of the spiritual element, or merger in Reality, or even union, as an end in itself, have nothing in common with systems like Sikhism where human duty is ever to carry out the Will of God. In each case, the endeavour or activity is directed towards opposite ends. And this alone makes for a fundamental difference. It is the Yogic or Jainic goal of isolation of the spiritual monad that made asceticism and monasticism distinct features and institutions of the Indian culture and history. And, it is these institutions that arose only in India, and are typically Indian contribution to foreign cultures like the Egyptian, Christian, etc. For, such asceticism was unknown to Babylonians or early Egyptians or Iranians. Hence the importance of goal in the study of different religions. The influence of the goal of isolation and of asceticism and monasticism as a sequel, has, indeed, been profuse and fundamental. In contrast with it was the Vedic ideal of activity, heaven and sacrifices under which everything in this world and even in the next could be sought and obtained by the meticulous performance of rituals. Probably, as a compromise, the system of four Ashrams was devised early in the Upanisadic times. But, this compromise remained mostly a paper ideal and the basic dichotomy of goals and approach continued not only to cause confusion, but also to effect adversely the religious growth, with attendant effects, sometimes quite adverse, on the moral, social and cultural developments. Hence the fundamental importance of the goal set in a religious system.

6. MYSTIC COMMUNION AND FACTOR OF FREEDOM

The issue of mystic communion has every great relevance for believers in and students of religion. Scholars, especially

students of anthropology, sociology and history, believing only in deterministic and environmental philosophies and factors, are liable to make serious errors of understanding and interpretation, if they ignore this factor of freedom or mystic communion in relation to a religious tradition movement, or development. Let us try to define this factor of freedom or mystic communion. Most of the traditional religions believe that there is a higher level of Reality, different from the empirical or phenomenal reality of which we are a part and which works under a logic of cause and effect. All the same, under this logic, governing our entire rational thinking, we are unable to explain the First cause or the Original Causeless Cause, the Creator, or the Transcendent Reality, which is ineffable and cannot be described in terms of "Is or Is not". We do not know the logic governing this Reality or Consciousness and, therefore, call it Free or Creative, in so far as it introduces in human affairs a new element unexplained by the rational or scientific logic of man. Mystics or prophets like Buddha, Christ, Muhammad and the Sikh Gurus have not only asserted the existence of such a Reality, but have also claimed some kind of touch, link or communion with that Reality or Consciousness. Christ clearly asserts his communion with God. Buddha too claims elevation to the state of Nirvana. The Sikh Gurus also repeatedly affirm that it is the Divine message that they have been delivering.

But, materialistic, deterministic or behavioural philosophies do not accept such statements or claims. This is understandable. But, it would be grossly naive to interpret the martyrdoms of Christ and the Sikh Gurus on the deterministic basis and ignore altogether the element of freedom and creativity in human affairs. In fact, it is from the sacrifices of these men, that we understand and accept the value and validity of a free, moral or creative life. Otherwise, all talk of honesty, integrity and truth would be sheer hypocrisy and moonshine; since the realistic spectacle today is that the best of our teachers, scientists and academicians barter away their services, without any tangible compunction or protest,

to their respective national states feverishly engaged in constructing engines of death and destruction for the rest of mankind. Against this background, it would be almost a perversion either to dub the statements and deeds of these great martyrs as actuated by hallucination, or determined by environmental causality.

Therefore, in assessing or comparing a religious thesis, it is important to know whether the founder of the faith claims communion with the Creative Consciousness. While the role of men like Luther or other religious leaders could be understood or explained by the means of environmental, deterministic factors, such an explanation would be simply incongruous when applied to creative individuals like Christ, Buddha or the Sikh Gurus, who themselves claim touch with Higher Reality. Therefore, religious developments initiated by the creative individuals have to be viewed and appreciated very differently from the subsequent developments when that personality is off the stage of history. Hence, the importance of this issue and the claims of the prophet concerned.

7. THE PATH AND PRACTICES FOR THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE GOAL

The discipline and methods suggested for attaining the spiritual goal in any system have an obvious relevance in any comparative study. Of course, the methods and practices prescribed are determined by the doctrines and ideals of the system, but these certainly clarify them, as also its basic tenets, structure and approach to social life. Religious leaders have prescribed a large number of practices and disciplines aimed at achieving the spiritual goal. For example, methods of Yoga, asceticism, one-point concentration, etc., varying in their rigour and duration, have been suggested. In Buddhism and Catholic Christianity, monasticism is a recognized mode of spiritual attainments. Side by side, celibacy and withdrawal from life are also prescribed. Ritualism and the potency and the mystic power

of the recitation, or repetition of words and Mantras, too has been deemed spiritually efficacious. Deep religious devotion, including song and dance, and the invoking of ecstasy, are also religious practices. In a system like that of Naths and some other Saiva systems extreme formalism in dress and odd living, celibacy, Ahimsa and non-engagement in any work, are prescribed; and, alternatively, even sensual indulgence has been recognised. As against all these methods, the emphasis in some religions on moral deeds and carrying out the Will of God is deemed to be of primary significance and value in the spiritual progress. In Sikhism, the greatest stress is on moral deeds, on which alone human assessment is based. Evidently, different methodologies and spiritual practices are linked to different systems. For, celibacy, asceticism, ritualism and monasticism have no place in a system where the stress is on moral deeds, leading to the spiritual development of man. So much so, that a system like Sikhism, prescribing the medium of moral deeds as the major vehicle of spiritual progress, clearly rejects or frowns upon methods of asceticism, ritualism or formalism as of any value. Such systems in their methodology and practices stand at opposite extremes without any meeting ground between them. That is so in the case of Sikhism and Nathism. Therefore, the principal modes of the discipline prescribed throw considerable light on the character, class, ideals, and affinities of a religious system.

8. ROLE OF THE SUPERMAN

Another major issue is the role of the superman. The goal, the philosophy, its discipline and its attitude to the world are important distinguishing features in identifying and classifying different religious systems. Though largely depending on the other basic characteristics of a system, the role of the superman is a very significant point in differentiating between traditions, and understanding whether these are allied or not. For example, in the case of systems like Yoga, Sankhya, or Jainism, the superman, once isolated, is away forever from the world of man.

He has, with extreme asceticism and discipline, sought and achieved his liberation from the world. He is, therefore, not going to re-involve himself in its entanglements. The Jain Tirthankra would not answer or respond to any prayers of men below. Similarly, in the Vedantic system, where 'I am Brahman' (aham Brahm asmi) is the final stage of achievement, any involvement in the relative world of man is a fall. Once liberated, the question of return to a lower stage of development does not arise. Hence in this system, the liberated person ceases to have any meaningful link with the world. In systems where the ideal is merger in the absolute, or bliss and tranquility of union with the Absolute as an end in itself, the superman has virtually no role to play. But, the position is very different in systems where the superman considers it his primary duty to carry out an attributive or creative role in life. For example, Guru Nanak's first words after his enlightenment were, "There is no Hindu, nor Mussalman." Again he says that "real superman is one who treats every person as one's own and equal." In this system, the important thing is man. The superman is spontaneously benevolent and "God showers his grace where the weak are helped." "He is the Shelter for the shelterless". So is the role of the superman. In such systems, the redemption of man is the primary concern. The sixth Guru stated that his sword is to deal with the tyrants. Obviously, where the ideology and methodology are very different, the role of the superman after his achievement is equally divergent in activity and direction.

9.SUPERMAN AND SOCIO-POLITICAL ACTIVITY

Different answers to this issue also sharply distinguish one religious system from the other. While socio-political activity on the part of the superman is the logical culmination in a system where the primary interest is in man and his future, in many religions such activity is virtually a taboo for the superman. Islam and Sikhism are the two systems where the responsibility of socio-political life are accepted as a religious duty. Probably, the

case of Joan of Arc is the solitary example in the Christian world where a person of God has felt compelled to enter the political field. Except regarding caste duties, all the Indian traditions (other than Sikhism), and to an extent even Christianity, are against it. It is for this reason that a person like Toynbee criticises Prophet Mohammad for taking up socio-political activity. Similarly, Tagore, Gandhi, and J.N. Sarkar adversely comment on the role of Guru Gobind Singh. It is on account of the same background that McLeod has failed to understand the role of the sixth to tenth Gurus, and has to raise the prop or phantom of Jat infiltration in order to explain the militarization of the Sikh movement. The case of Buddhism and Sikhism will clarify the issue and the sharp differences in that regard. In Buddhism, world is a place of suffering wherein salvation could be only in Nirvana. Good deeds in this world could never lead to Nirvana, though these could give a better birth. So much so, that, once in Nirvana, further activity is stopped. It is only at the penultimate stage of Arhat, that activity could be possible. Buddha was clearly requested to return to his kingdom, but he declined to do so. While there is no doubt that Buddhism has a strong ethical content, Its doctrine of Ahimsa and world being, a suffering almost place a bar against socio-political activity by the superman. As against it, in Sikhism, since man is the primary object of Interest, as explained by the sixth Guru to saint Ramdas, socio-political activity becomes a logical and moral duty of every religious person. It is on account of these fundamental differences of ideology that some historians have accused Buddhistic Ahimsa to be the cause of India's political subjugation, and, on the other hand, others have criticized Sikh Gurus for wrongly diverting the pure stream of religion into the muddy fields of politics. But, it is these basic ideological differences that have led the two traditions to play distinctly divergent roles in history.

10. ETHICS

Just like the methodology and discipline, the ethics of a

system is the projection and product of its basic doctrines and ideals. For, the value system of a religion has primarily been devised to serve, aid and help in achieving its goals. Accordingly, as there are variations in spiritual goals, there are differences in the ethical systems. Further, religions, which do not accept any social responsibility, or are other worldly, have ethics which is quite divergent from the one in which the love of man and love of God are almost synonymous. Both in Yoga and Nathism, no social responsibility is accepted. Each individual has to secure his own release from the bondage and misery of the world. In the individual's spiritual venture, he alone has to help himself. Not that truth and purity of conduct have no meaning, but these have no social relevance. Therefore, the ethical systems of religions like Christianity and Yoga-Sankhya are in many ways quite contrasted. In Sikhism, God is the Ocean of attributes. Its ethics is basically social, because attributes have a meaning mainly in the social field. Where God is the succour of the helpless, the seeker has necessarily to accept social responsibility and consequently an ethics that is socially oriented. For example, the Sikh Gurus lay down the theological doctrine of the Fatherhood of God and also the logical ethical corollaries of the brotherhood of man and treating everyone as equal. Evidently, these corollaries are pregnantly and emphatically social in their content. All these three concepts form a unified and integrated doctrine. No part of it can be divorced from the other.

Let us also take the example of Buddhism. According to the Hinayana Buddhism, the fate of every one is the result of his earlier deeds, One's blindness is due to one's own faults. It is a single line of ethical or moral responsibility. But, in the Mahayana, the ethical system is very different. It involves both aggregate and individual responsibility. This acceptance of social responsibility and consequent shift to a socially oriented ethics is evidently the result of the Bodhisatva doctrine. So much so, that the Mahayana Buddhists, with their socially oriented ethics, their Bodhisatva doctrine, and their concept of aggregate

responsibility, call the ethics of Hinayana as individualistic and selfish. And yet with the goals set in the Hinayana system, its ethics is perfectly logical and consonant with its doctrines and system. Hence, the ethics of a religion, being intimately linked to its fundamentals, is very relevant and helpful in understanding its doctrines and goals.

11. THE UNITY OF PERCEPTION, IDEOLOGY AND ACTIVITIES

In rightly understanding a religious system, and in appreciating and placing its different doctrines in their proper perspective, it is essential to bear the unity of perception, ideology and activities in mind. Let us first explain what we mean by the unity of perception, ideology, and activity. Almost every religion owes its origin to the mystic or higher religious experience of some personality or prophet. Actually, it is this experience, which forms the real fount of the entire ideology, mission and activities of the mystics. In this sequence, the first stage is the perception or the religious experience. At the second stage, the saint, naturally, tries to understand it, and reacts to it. This is the stage where thought appears or intervenes. This reaction constitutes both the ideology and the proposed plan of the saint for giving practical shape to the Ideology. This ideology and plan are generally understood and interpreted by others from the words expressed, or other means of communication resorted to, by the saint. The third stage is the life actually lived by the saint. This forms his real response to his higher religious experience and reflects his ideology and the decisions made thereunder. For example, if the religious experience of a mystic is that God is all love, is the Shelter for the shelterless and Help of the helpless, the mystic's ideology is that God is the Ocean of virtues and a God of attributes. In line with it, and as a reaction to this experience, he compulsively frames a plan of action of love and help to the poor and the needy. Accordingly, the activities undertaken and programmes initiated and executed by the saint

are the true reflection and projection of his higher religious experience and the consequent ideology. The fourth Sikh Guru explains the point in a beautiful and apt simile "While experiencing you, the "I" is gone. The difference of "you" and "I" is obliterated. It is now only "you" flowing." The activities of the saint are only the form and shape which the basic experience directs and takes. Such mystics rarely express in words the nature of their religious experience, it being generally ineffable. And, even if they do, the description is too inadequate to form the basis of a rational system. For the same reasons, even the utterances and statements of these persons are not always clear or those are too brief and merely symbolic. In fact, these are not meant to be such; nor are these always aimed at laying a comprehensive religious philosophy. It is in the interpretation of these statements that students of religion and others make major errors of understanding and deduction. But, it is the deeds and activities of the person that portray truly and directly his higher religious experience and ideology. All we seek to stress is, first, the inalienable unity of experience, ideology and activity; and, second, the activities of the saint alone being the right key to the understanding and appreciation of his perceptions and message. So often, mere statements, taken in their isolation, have been wrongly interpreted, especially by those distant in time and space. Because, howsoever, sophisticated these be rational tools cannot rise above the prejudices and predilections of the person employing them.

Scholars, trained in a behaviouristic or mechanical methodology, have generally a tendency to trace one religious development from a preceding one. But, trying to build such a chain of ratiocination is a virtual denial of the validity, the very novelty, and the free character of the religious experience. Hence, the need for adhering to the principle of the unity of experience, ideology and activity, and of understanding and interpreting a religious message purely from the activities of its author. Otherwise, so often students of religion fall into the error of

picking up seemingly common utterances of two religious pioneers and then of trying to relate them to a common source or a connecting bond. Mere words and statements unrelated to the deeds of their author are quite likely to be misunderstood and misinterpreted. Deeds alone are the true index of the ideology of the author.

12. THE WORLD-VIEW

The world-view of a system is the best expression of its philosophy and appreciation of human destiny of its aims and objectives, and of the direction in which men must move. The world-view represents the character and class of a system. Schweitzer, in his survey of different philosophical and religious systems, classifies them broadly in two distinct categories, the one with the world-view of life-affirmation and the other that is largely life-denying. In one case, creative and ethical participation in life is the spiritual goal. In the other case, withdrawal from the world and merger or union with Reality is the natural aim. The broad features of the two types of systems are quite characteristic and contrasted. In one case moral life forms the chief fundamental of spiritual progress. For example, Guru Nanak says that the superman is he who treats all as his equals. In the other case, withdrawal from life, asceticism or monasticism forms an integral part of the religious discipline. Therefore, in appreciating the meaning and import of the doctrines and practices of a system, the context of its world-view has to be kept in view. For, each part not only reflects the other but in turn also determines it.

We have tried to indicate the principles, measures and methodology which can be helpful in understanding the features and class of a religious system. For obvious reasons, many of these principles overlap each other. Because, it is the components of an integrated whole that have to be taken up individually and features of each part noted in isolation, so as to identify the same and the whole in the light of the principles stated above.

In the above context, we shall now proceed to examine and compare the four systems that form the subject of our essay.

□

1. THE CONCEPT OF GOD

At the very outset we should like to say one thing. Obviously, it is not possible to deal with all aspects of Sikhism in the space available to us. We shall, therefore, confine ourselves only to the essentials of Sikhism, and highlight only those aspects of it that clarify and underline the point of view which we wish to express.

The Sikh Gurus are uncompromising monotheists. In the very opening line of the Guru Granth, God is described by Guru Nanak as "By the Grace of the Sole One, Self-existent and Immanent, the Creator Person, without Fear or Un-conditioned, without enmity or Un-contradicted, the Timeless Person, Un-incarnated, Self-created and Enlightener.¹ God is never born. The becoming world is His creation, and not his emanation; nor is it identical with Him.

We shall first indicate, briefly, the kind of God that is envisaged in Sikhism. In their hymns, the Gurus described God in numerous ways, referring to His social, political, aesthetic, metaphysical, ethical and other attributes. But a few aspects of God need particular mention. These will enable us to understand the significance, origin and objectives of the Sikh tradition, institutions and practices.

(i) *Creator* : God is the Creator. The universe is His creation. The very concept of a Creator-God implies a universe as different from Him. The universe is in time and space. It is changing and is governed by fixed laws. The Creator is different from the

creation, which is limited and conditioned. As Creator, God is Free. He is not determined by any laws known to us. He is not the material cause of the universe. But, no independent Prakriti is assumed "God created the world of life, planted Naam (Immanent God) therein, and made it the seat of righteousness."² He creates all, fills all, and is yet separate."³ There are many hymns in the Guru Granth which mention that God was there even before He created the Universe, He being Transcendent. "He is the Sole-creator. There is no second one."⁴ "God was by Himself and there was nothing else." "In the region of Truth, God creates perpetually, and watches His creation with a Benevolent eye. He is happy about it, and deliberates over it, directing it with His will."⁵ God is Ever-Creative.

This gives an idea of God, His creative activity, and the cosmological aspect of His creation.

(ii) *Transcendent and immanent*: God is both Transcendent and Immanent. He is both in the universe and outside it. While time, space, and change are features of the becoming universe, God is Eternal, Self-existent. He cannot be conceived or explained in empirical terms. He is beyond space and beyond time. The Gurus have cautioned us against the inadequacy of human logic to comprehend Him. He is Entirely Different, or 'Wholly Other'. "When there was no form in sight, how could there be good or bad actions. When God was in the Self-Absorbed state, there could be no enmity or conflict."⁶ That state of God is to be envisaged in terms of spacelessness and timelessness. The nature of God transcends all known categories of thought. The Creator of these limited categories cannot be judged by them. The Gurus call Him Unfathomable, Indescribable and Ineffable. "The mind alone can know Him."⁷ He is transcendent.

The immanent aspect of God has been variously described as His Will that directs the universe, His Word that informs the universe, and His Naam that not only creates the entire universe but also sustains and governs it. "God creates the universe, takes His abode in it and sustains it."⁸ God creates the universe and

becomes Immanent in it, being at the same time Transcendent. "He that permeates all hearts is Transcendent too."⁹ "Having created the world, He stands in the midst of it and is separate too."¹⁰ This Immanence of God is only a symbolic way of expressing God's connection with the world. When the world was not there the question of His Immanence did not arise. When "there was no form, the Word (Immanence) in essence abided in the Transcendent God."¹¹

The Immanence of God is important. It emphasises the spiritual and meaningful character of the universe and life's capacity for relationship with God. His Immanence indicates God's Love for His creation. This immanence gives relevance, authenticity, direction and sanction to the entire moral and spiritual life of man. It also emphasises God's capacity for revelation, His nearness to man and His deep and abiding interest in the world. All theistic systems assume His Immanence. For, where God is only Transcendent and Unapproachable, all moral and spiritual life would become pointless.

God's being both Transcendent and Immanent, does not mean that there are two parts, stages, or phases of God. It is the Transcendent God who is everywhere in each heart, place and particle. It is He who is both Transcendent and Immanent. "The same God is Sargun and Nirgun, Nirankar and self-Absorbed (Sun Samadhi)"¹² Sargun and Nirgun are created by Nam."¹³ "He is the One, both Nirgun and Sargun."¹⁴ The Gurus repeatedly emphasise that He is One and we only give Him different names. It would be highly inappropriate to confuse the Gurus' concept of Sargun and Nirgun (One Transcendent cum Immanent God) with the Vaisnava meaning of these terms or with the idea of Ishvara. These Vaisnava concepts of phases, or stages, have been clearly repudiated by the Gurus' concept of one God.

(iii) *God of Attributes*: The Gurus call God the 'Ocean of Attributes, Values and Virtues.' This aspect of God is of importance in indicating the spiritual and moral trends and the character of Sikhism. A God of Attributes lays down the ideals

for which man has to work. Its significance has often been missed. "He is always Benevolent." "You are my Mother, You are my Father, You are my Protector everywhere." "He relieves the sufferings of the downtrodden; He is the Succour of the succourless"¹⁵ "God is eyes to the blind, riches to the poor, Nanak, He is the Ocean of virtues."¹⁶

This Attributive aspect of God not only links God with the universe, but it establishes beyond doubt the character and direction of God's Will. This leads to four important conclusions. First, attributes and values have relevance only in a becoming or relative world. Because all perfection is static and all qualities are relative. A God of Attributes has, thus, a meaning only in relation to the changing world of man. Evidently, for the expression of attributes, a changing universe is essential and becomes an integral part of the creative plan of God. God and the universe are, thus, closely linked. It is impossible to think of a God of Attributes in the absence of a changing world. That is why when God was all by Himself, the question of 'Love and devotion or good or bad actions',¹⁷ could not arise. Secondly, and this is the most important inference, virtues and attributes emphatically indicate, apart from the standard of ethical values and moral life, the direction in which spiritual efforts should be made. These point out the purposes for which the Will of God works. Thirdly, it indicates the continuing interest of God in man and the universe. This gives authenticity to life and the universe which is as we shall see, decried or down-graded in many other religious traditions. In addition, there is the benevolent character of God. Not only is He the Creator and Sustainer of life, he nurtures and develops it with loving care. He has also been called the Enlightener (Guru or Guide) of man. "He rewards your efforts and acknowledges your deeds." "God rewards all efforts to become divine."¹⁸ It gives a pre-eminent meaning to life, and optimism hope and confidence to man in the achievement of his ideals. Man is given a clear direction in which he should move. In addition, he also knows that there is

some one to guide and help him with love. Lastly, it gives primary validity and spiritual sanction to the moral life of man. For, in many other systems, it is deemed to be an entanglement. At best, some systems accept it as the preparatory method of purity for the spiritual life to be attained. But, in Sikh theology, this attributive aspect of God gives a clear priority, primacy and spiritual character to the moral life of man. This is the reason that in Sikhism moral life is of basic importance both for the seeker and the Gurmukh. For, if God is the helper of the weak and the ocean of virtues, the spiritual person has to shape himself likewise.

(iv) *God has a will*: Everything is governed by His Will. "Everything happens within the ambit of His Will."¹⁹ A God of Will naturally pre-supposes that He wants the universe to move not chaotically but in a system and with a Purpose. Just like the Attributes of God, God's Will too can be exercised only in a changing world and towards a goal. The very idea of a Will implies a direction and an aim. This, too, re-emphasises the same points as stated in regard to a God of Attributes. The direction is governed by the Attributes of God and the Purpose, as we shall see later, is to evolve a higher consciousness in man. This concept is central to Sikh theology. But, a God of Will does not at all mean a predeterministic world, because God is Creative and Free; and all movement in life is towards a creative freedom.

(v) *God does not incarnate*: God has been mentioned as one who never takes birth, nor takes form. "May that mouth burn which says that God has incarnated."²⁰ "God alone is the One who is not born of a woman."²¹ The Gurus have definitely decried belief in the theory of incarnation. In order to dispel such ideas, they have stated that He created countless Brahmas, Sivas and Vishnus. "The Formless, One, alone, Nanak, is without fear; many are Ramas as the dust of His feet, and many Krishnas. Many are their stories and many are the Vedas. The idea that God never takes the human form has distinct implications. First, it shows that God is 'Wholly Other'. For a God that is

Transcendent and Unknowable, the question of His taking the human form does not arise. Secondly, all pantheistic implications, as flowing from the idea of incarnation, are ipso facto repudiated. Besides, the concept has three other corollaries too.

The first is that man can never become God, and that God and man are not identical. Secondly, it indicates that the aim of spiritual effort is not merger in God, as under some other systems, but to be in tune with Him. This has a crucial significance in determining the human goal, and in showing that the entity of man is distinct from that of God. The two can never be one, though man can be His instrument. Thirdly, it, *inter alia*, shows that spiritual activity does not stop after the final achievement. The superman has a role to perform in carrying out the Will of God. Consequently, so long as the universe is there and the Will of God is in operation, the activities and duties of the superman continue endlessly.

(vi) *God of Grace*: God has been called Gracious and Enlightener. A God of Will and a God of Grace have a meaning only in a becoming world wherein alone His Grace and Will can operate. These aspects of God also emphasise His Personal character. Grace implies that God's Will is free, undetermined by any outside law. In addition, it also stresses the Love and Benevolence of God towards man. For, a Gracious Being can bestow His Grace only on something other than Himself. It has been repeatedly stressed that all final approval of man is an act of God's Grace. "O Nanak, the intellect is of no avail, one is approved only by His Grace."²³ A God of Grace dispels the idea that the world is deterministic. His activity is, therefore, incomprehensible except in terms of His Grace or Freedom.

Naam: The Sikh Gurus have given the word Naam, a distinct and significant meaning, which is far different from that of the mere 'Naam' or psychic factors as understood in the traditional literature. "Naam sustains all regions and universes, all thought, knowledge and consciousness, all skies and stars, all forces and substances, all continents and spheres. He, on whom

is His Grace, is yoked to Naam and he reaches the highest state of development."²⁴ Naam is the Creator of everything." "Naam gives form to everything, and through Naam comes all Wisdom or Light."²⁵ Naam is the 'Nine Treasures' and Nectar (Amrit).

From the above verses it is clear that the Gurus do not use the word Naam in any restrictive or limited sense. They refer to it as the Highest Power, creating, informing, supporting and working the entire universe. The highest state of man is mentioned as the one when he lives and works in tune with God or Naam. Therefore, God and Naam are Real, Eternal and Unfathomable. It means that God and Naam are one and the same. Naam may be called the immanent or the qualitative aspect of God, working and directing the manifest world of force and form.

2. THE WORLD

Sikhism proclaims the dynamic reality and authenticity of the world and life. "God created the world of life and planted Naam therein, making it the place of righteous activity."²⁶ God created the world and permeated it with His Light."²⁷ Since Naam has not only created the world but is also supporting, controlling and directing it, the same cannot be unreal or Fruitless. His Immanence in this world guarantees its being a place of righteous action. "True are thy worlds and thy universes; true are the forms Thou createst. True are Thy deeds."²⁸ "True is He, True is His Creation."²⁹

The world being real, creative work and virtuous deeds are of fundamental importance. "The Guru contemplates God by word, thought and deed." "Earth is the true abode of Righteousness."³⁰ "Truth and continence are true deeds, not fasting and rituals."³¹ "Good, righteousness, virtue and the giving up of vice are the way to realize the essence of God."³²

The above quotations affirm unambiguously the reality and significance of human life. Practices involving direct or indirect rejection of life have been denounced. There is a hymn in the

Guru Granth by Farid which would seem to suggest that the world is not real or is a place of suffering. While recording it in the Guru Granth, the fifth Guru has introduced, along with it, another hymn of his own. It is a clarification to dispel the contrary impression. He writes, "Beauteous, O Farid, are the garden of earth and the human-body."³³ The Guru further states - "Deride not the world as it is the creation of God."³⁴

This emphatic assertion about the reality of the world is a clear departure from the Indian religious tradition. The Gurus were extremely conscious of this radical and fundamental change they were making. That is why, both in their lives and in their hymns, they have been laying stress on this aspect of their spiritual thesis, lest they should be misunderstood on this basic issue. Living in this world is not a bondage for them but a rare opportunity. Not only is God benevolently developing and guiding the world in which He is immanent, but each one of us is "yoked to his task and each is assigned a duty to perform."³⁵ The persistent interest of God in the creative movement is also obvious from the fact that the Gurus call Him Protector, Father, and a Just Administrator.

While discussing the concept of God of Attributes, Will and Grace, we have indicated its far-reaching implications about the reality of the world and the spiritual primacy of moral life therein. These aspects of God intimately connect Him with the world which is their only field of operation. Consequently, the Gurus' message and mission also relate to this world, wherein alone their mission could be fulfilled. No prayer has been expressed with greater depth and intensity than the one for the 'gift of Naam'. Naam being the Benevolent Supporter and Director of the world, the gift of Naam to the devotee only means an enlightened, loving and creative interest in the world and its development. How can one claim to be a devotee of God or Naam and ask for its gift and, yet decline to toe the line of God, namely, of nurturing and advancing the processes of creativity and construction in the world. It is for this reason that the Gurus

have strongly condemned all ascetic and escapist practices. "One reaches not Truth by remaining motionless like trees and stones, nor by being sawn alive."³⁶

In India, generally, the householder's duties were not believed to be conducive to higher spiritual attainments. That is why one had to renounce worldly activities and take to the life of a hermit or Sanyasin. As against it, all the Sikh Gurus, excepting the eighth Guru, who passed away at an early age, were married householders. Till the last days of their lives, they worked creatively and carried out their mission in the social and political fields. Seen in the context of Indian tradition, the ideals and institutions of Sikhism are entirely different. For the Gurus the world is a place of beauty. Man's struggle therein provides an opportunity for his progress. Hence the arena of man's and mystic's work has to be in life and life alone. It is only the challenges of life that enable man to show and test his moral and spiritual fibre. It is his deeds in the world that alone form the basis of his spiritual assessment. The Guru, therefore, emphasizes that "one gets not to God by despising the world,"

3. HAUMAIN

The doctrine of Haurnain is basic to Sikh theology. The present state of man's consciousness, the Gurus say, is egoistic, i.e. it is governed by Haumain. The Gurus call such a person. Manmukh. In this normal state of man, his self-will and animal propensities dominate. The ideal man, with the highest level of consciousness or God consciousness, is called Gurnukh. This egoistic consciousness or Haumain is the cause of all man's problems and limitations. This doctrine of Haumain holds the key to the understanding of Sikhism.

Haumain is the "I" of the normal individual psyche. It is the director of all one's organs, including the nervous system and human reason. It is the self, the ego, or the centre of control of all working in every being or individual. The Gurus say that "the world came into being by individuation."³⁷ Evidently, for

the growth of life, this creation of an individual self or Haumain in every being was essential. There could be no animal life without there being in each organism a centre of consciousness. Haumain has, thus, enabled the evolution of life. Every man is equipped with many kinds of organs and faculties. These faculties, including his thoughts, are subservient to his individuality, self or ego. Throughout the evolution of life, this ego-centre, or Haumain has been the instrument and guardian of his security, welfare and progress. Without a deep commitment to the interests, preservation and progress of the self, to the exclusion of every other being or self, life could never survive the battle against challenges from the environment. This ego, or Haumain, has been the best means of securing the survival and the progress of life from amoeba to man.

But, what has been the very means of life's survival and progress, has now become "the great malady of man."³⁸ The struggle against the elements and other species having been largely won, man still finds himself quite unequipped and helpless in dealing with the other members of his own species. The Gurus emphasise that this Haumain has become the greatest problem of man both for his social life and future progress. Just as it is impossible for one's stomach or liver to digest food for another person; in much the same way, it is impossible for one's thought system, intellect or reason to be anything but self-centred, the same being basically subservient to the individual self or ego-consciousness. It is this organic condition of man that the Gurus call Haumain or ego. Man's consciousness being self-centred, he is constitutionally incapable of looking to the interests of others. This is the root cause of the entire conflict between man and man, between one society and the other, and between one nation and the other. Man is very well equipped intellectually and materially, yet poverty, misery, and war remain his major unsolved problems. The altruistic tendencies developed in man as the result of cultural conditioning over the years are only superficial or conditioned. Spontaneous altruism is

constitutionally and psychologically impossible in the ego-centric or Haumain governed man. The moment, the struggle for existence becomes keen, the basic self-centredness of man comes into play. Thus start all the conflicts of man, social as well as national and international.

According to the Guru in this state of Haumain man has three limitations. He and his consciousness are alienated or unconnected with the Basic or the Higher Consciousness that is the source of all energy, virtues and goodness. "God created individuation but by forgetting Naam we come to grief." Secondly, he is unaware of his inalienable kinship with the other beings. Thirdly, ego-consciousness, by and large, works in a determined or mechanistic way. It is not creative or free. The Basic Reality or God alone is Free and Creative. God is the causeless Cause or the Un-created Creator. We have already referred to two important aspects of God. He is Creative or Free, He is the Ocean of values and virtues. Man's ego-centrism or Haumain thus, constitutes his basic moral or spiritual problem. The fundamental question is, how to shed one's egoism and transcend one's present limiting state or development.

4. SOLUTION

The Gurus are not pessimistic about the world or this ego-centric condition of man. They emphasise that man is not only capable of transcending this ego-consciousness, but is destined to do so. Their entire message is meant to solve this problem. Theirs is a crusade to enable man to rise above his present level and remove the hurdles that plague him and solve the problems that face him.

The Gurus indicate that there has been a continuing process of development, evolution and progress in the empirical world. They point out that progress from egoistic man to the superman, or God-centred man is not only possible, but is in accordance with the purpose of God. Individuation was created by God. There has been gradual growth from small organisms to animals

and finally to the animal-man with his subtle sense of discrimination and introspection. "For several births (you) were a mere worm, is for several births insect, for several births a fish or an d animal."³⁹ "After ages you have the glory of being a man." "He endowed you with the light of reason, discrimination and wisdom"⁴⁰ "O man you are supreme in God's creation; now is : your opportunity. You mayor may not fulfil your destiny."⁴¹

Further progress of this egoistic man depends entirely only the deeds of the individual. Till man had appeared on the scene, it was not possible for life to outgrow its animal character and alienation from God. So far, like other animals, man too has been living an animal life. But, the Gurus emphasise the opportunity available to man to grow into a superman. They repeatedly address man to give up his egocentric activities and thereby to rise to his full stature. "After ages, this invaluable opportunity of human birth is available, but one loses it for nothing."⁴² "You have obtained the privilege of human birth, now is your only opportunity to meet God."⁴³

The remedy according to the Gurus is that man should develop a higher consciousness by linking his consciousness with God, Naam, or the Basic Consciousness. It is this solution which is the basis of their religious system and institutions. The Guru says, "Naam and Haumain are opposed, to each other. The two cannot co-exist."⁴⁴ "Haumain is a great, malady. The remedy is to attune oneself to Naam by God's Grace."⁴⁵ It means that self-centredness should be substituted by God-centredness. "The man who is self-centred is far from God."⁴⁶

Let us explain the implications of these important hymns. In most other religions, worldly life is opposed to spiritual life. But, not so in Sikhism. Here it is ego-centric life that is opposed to spiritual life and not worldly life as such. The Gurus consider the world to be real and accept full responsibilities in that regard. In fact, as God-centredness implies activity in the worldly life, the same is considered essential for the seeker and the God-conscious person. For, link with Naam means to be the agent of

Dynamic Naam or God, the Ocean of virtues. In fact, life and its activities alone reveal the distinction between a self-centred man and a God centred one. Hence, "he who destroys evil becomes a perfect man."⁴⁷ "Love, contentment, truth, humility and other virtues enable the seed of Naam to sprout."⁴⁸ "Our deeds alone bear witness unto our life."⁴⁹

These hymns indicate that the way to higher achievement lies in being altruistic or moral instead of being self-centred. Except for some conditioned or calculated moral activity, a self-centred person cannot be spontaneously altruistic. The solution really consists in transferring the control of the mind and body from narrow ego-consciousness to Naam God or God-consciousness. And being linked to Naam involves neither inactivity nor withdrawal from life. Perforce it just lead to spontaneous altruistic deeds because this consciousness is aware of its kinship both with every other being and with the Basic Reality, the Ocean of virtues. Therefore, this consciousness accepts total responsibility and is as active as the Creative Reality. Just as Haumain and Naam are opposed to each other, in the same manner God-centredness and inactivity are a contradiction in terms.

We shall explain why there is so much emphasis on moral life in Sikhism. A self-centred person has virtually a determined psyche. He is neither free, nor creative. The progress from self-centredness to God-consciousness, is progress from a virtually determined or a mechanistic state to a free and creative state. A moral act involves voluntary decision on the part of one's consciousness. We never call a material thing to be moral or immoral, since it is governed by the laws of physics and its movement is determined. But, a moral act on the part of a person is the result of his free will or decision or choice. It is, thus, a clear step on the path from being determined to being free; it is an effort to rise from the state of Haumain to the state of God-consciousness or creative freedom. It is, indeed, a spiritual act. Hence the fundamental importance of moral life in Sikhism, since it is the only spiritual means leading towards God-

consciousness. "One cannot be a Yogi by mere wishing. Real Yoga lies in treating all beings alike."⁵⁰ "Let all be called high, to me none appears low; one potter has fashioned all vessels and one light pervades the whole universe."⁵¹ Real spiritual life involves the acceptance and practice of the idea of the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man in one's actual living. The Gurus stress that God pervades all hearts and one can attune oneself to Him and develop a new state of higher consciousness. While we are in the normal ego-state, we are unconscious of this Immanence of God in us. "Where there is egoism, God is not; where there is God, there cannot be any egoism."⁵² "God unites seeker with Himself." "God pervades the heart and one gives up ego and evil."⁵³ "By His Grace God comes in body and mind." It means that the entire psyche of such a person is guided by God-consciousness. "By Naam is the mind illumined."⁵⁴ Naam dynamic and attributive.

These hymns emphasise that the way to solve our problems and difficulties is to establish a relation with God. This presence of God in us has variously been described as Naam, Guru, Word, Light and Will.

It is virtuous deed alone that lead one away from the life of Haumain and towards the path of Naam or God centredness. But, ultimately it is 'only God's Grace that unites one with Naam. By this union a new and higher centre of consciousness is gained, called God-consciousness. With God's Grace is the ultimate insignia of approval conferred on man."⁵⁵ It is a state when the human consciousness becomes free and spontaneously moral and altruistic.

Guru Nanak puts the question as to "how the wall of falsehood intervening between us and Reality can be removed and gives a categorical reply. "It can be done by carrying out God's Will."⁵⁶ And God's Will is Attributive, Creative and Gracious. This explains the pre-eminent importance of moral life in Sikhism.

5. GOAL

The next issue is as to what is the goal in Sikhism. In this field the Gurus have made a completely radical departure from the general religious tradition, more especially from the Indian tradition. Many misunderstandings about the ideology, growth and history of Sikhism, arise because of the fallacious assumption that goal in Sikhism is the same as in the other Indian religions.

The Gurus have explained their views about the spiritual goal of man by enunciating five principles. All of them point to the same conclusion about the ideal life.

(a) *Righteous deeds alone the basis of man's spiritual assessment:* In the first hymn of Cosmography, Guru Nanak suggests what should be the role of man on earth, which has been declared to be a place for the practice of righteousness. The assessment of man, Guru Nanak says, will be made on the basis and character of his deeds. This idea has been repeated in numerous hymns like. "With God only the deeds one does in this world, count."⁵⁷ "Through virtue is one enlightened."

(b) *Higher than Truth is Truthful living:* Guru Nanak states, "Everything is lower than Truth, but higher still is truthful living."⁵⁸ It is just a symbolic way of emphasizing that the ideal is to live the active life of truth and not only to know Truth as an end in itself. The goal is to live an active and creative life. "True living is, living God in life."⁵⁹

(c) *Carry out the Will of God:* Guru Nanak specifically raises the question as to how one can be a true human-being, or an ideal man. Then he himself provides the answer: "By carrying out the Will of God". The Gurus conceive of God as a God of Will, Dynamic, Attributive and Creative. God is always nurturing the world with a benevolent eye. For man, the ideal life is to carry out His Will. The goal is not only to establish union with God, nor only to know his Will, but after having done that, to carry it out. The ideal is not blissful union as an end in itself, but union in order to be God's instrument or agent in the world. Therefore, in Sikhism it involves a life of continuous

moral activity.

(d) *God-conscious man*: On the question of Haumain, we came to the conclusion that the Gurus lay down God-consciousness as the ideal. Because of his new consciousness he is spontaneously virtuous. All exhortations to man are to achieve his ideal by the practice of virtues. "In the soil of your body, sow the seed of godly deeds. In that field God sprouts."⁶⁰

(e) *Link with Naam*: Naam is Creative and Attributive Naam is working in the world with Benevolence and Love. A very large number of hymns in the Guru Granth request for individual being linked to Naam. "He reaches the highest stage whom God graciously galvanises to His Naam."⁶¹ "Pray, link me to God."

Accordingly, the ideal of Sikh Bhakti is to be yoked, attuned or linked to Naam. Naam being the opposite of egoism, and the Ocean of virtues and values, to be linked to Naam means only to become His instrument and share the responsibility of a creative and virtuous development in the world.

The Gurus have laid down these five principles prescribing the goal in Sikhism. Whether it is the ideal of God-consciousness, or of carrying out the Will of God, or of the gift of Naam, in essence all of them prescribe the same goal or spiritual truth. Again, whether it is the ideal of righteous deeds or of truthful living, the discipline and direction are exactly the same. We, therefore, come to the conclusion that in Sikhism, the goal is to develop a Higher consciousness and lead a life of creative and moral activity. It means that spiritual life and moral life are virtually synonymous and coextensive. One inevitably leads to the other.

It is in this context that the Gurus describe themselves as the "servants" of God and His "soldiers." The Gurus pray that their lives may be devoted to the service of God. "May I have millions of hands to serve Thee."⁶² "The service is the way to cross the hurdles of life." "Be ever alert in the service of God. Serve God every moment and relax not."⁶³ As the World is the authentic creation of God, supported by His Immanence, the service of God means the service of His creation. "Service in the

world leads to approval in Court of God."⁶⁴ This is the goal in Sikhism.

6. GURMUKH OR THE IDEAL MAN

The Gurus describe the qualities of the Gurmukh and the role he is expected to play in life. These draw a clear picture of the ideal life in Sikhism. The lives of the Gurus are another indication of that kind of life, the seeker and the Gurmukh are supposed to lead. Infact, Bhai Gurdas calls Guru Nanak also a Gurmukh. A Gurmukh, being the instrument of God, exhibits in his life all the qualities attributed to God: Because on the one hand he is in touch with God who is All Love, and on the other hand he is conscious of his close kinship with every other living being.

(i) *He is godly, and has all virtues:* "He (Gurmukh) is the ocean of virtues, pure and truthful."⁶⁵ "He deals in the virtues of God." "He is shelter for the shelterless." "God is Compassionate, Merciful and Support of the earth; and so is the nature of saints."⁶⁶ "The Gurmukh saves all and removes pain."⁶⁷ "He becomes like Him with whom imbued."⁶⁸ "He practises good spontaneously; he is the fountain spring of benevolence."⁶⁹ Being God-conscious, he is not alienated from his relationship with other beings.

(ii) *He carries out His Will:* God has a Will. The ideal man carries out that attributive Will. His mind is filled with Naam; true mind is imbued with Word, he serves truth, practises truth and earns truth." Imbued by His Will, he carries it out."⁷⁰ "The soldiers of God act just as He Wills." "Wonderful is His 'Will; one knows it only if one walks in his Will. Then alone one knows how to lead the life of truth."⁷¹ The Guru emphasises, that he who carries out His Will alone knows it; and he who knows it must carry it out. A Will known is essentially a Will carried out. "They who know His Will carry it out."⁷²

(iii) *He is the servant of God and man:* They "dedicate life to Him", he is "a combatant in the cause of God;"⁷³ he is the servant

of God." The Guru calls himself as "the slave of all creation."⁷⁴ The Guru prays: "the world is sick, O save it by any means you please."⁷⁵

This hymn is of classic significance. The Guru prays for the entire humanity. He does not want God to help men only through him. He makes no claim to exclusive prophethood. He wants everyone to be saved by any means God may be pleased to use. Nothing could be more expressive of the anonymity and humility of the Guru and his deep concern for the entire humanity.

(iv) *He partakes actively in all fields of life:* Unlike the Jivan Mukta in other systems, where the goal is union or merger as an end in itself, the Gurmukh's aim is not salvation for himself alone. He works for all, nor does he compromise with evil. For, "God's chosen is one who fights for the oppressed."⁷⁶ His responsibility is total. As the instrument of God, he works for others and in all fields of life. Just, as is the area of his responsibility, the Gurmukh's sphere of activity too is unlimited.

(v) *He aims to make all others God centred:* "He unites himself with God and unites others too with Him." "The servants of God salvage all."⁷⁷ "His self is emancipated and he emancipates others." The emphasis on this ideal of making everyone God-centred is so great that the Guru says that "God established the earth for the sake of God-centred persons."⁷⁸ This, in essence, means that the creation or evolution of the superman on earth is the purpose of God towards which all life is moving, and the Gurmukh works for it.

7. METHODOLOGY

The Gurus have prescribed three modes of discipline. (a) Company of God-centred persons, (b) moral life or service of man, and (c) prayer and remembering God. It is a code of conduct the seeker has to practise throughout the entire course of one's life.

(a) *Company of God-centred persons:* The Society of the ideal

man is of great value to the seeker, both as a model and as a guide. His influence is the best for shaping man's growing personality and giving him strength and direction in times of doubt and difficulty. "Just as the Harind (Castor Plant) imbibes the fragrance of Chandan tree, the fallen are emancipated by the saints." "In good company one becomes good." "God sends saints to reveal God's concern for man."⁷⁹

(b) *Moral life and service*: Guru Nanak says that the earth is a place for the practice of righteousness. In Sikhism, moral activity is a step towards freedom and creativity. Hence, the highest importance of moral activity in the spiritual training and system of the Gurus. Spiritual discipline aims at enabling man to face life in a righteous and creative way. As such, a householder's life is an essential moral responsibility of man. The seeker's training has to take place during the course of a normal life and not in a monastery. It is important to understand that the Gurus never created any monastic system or a place for the training of a few. The psyche can be properly conditioned only when it is subject to the stresses and strains of the social environment of man. One can learn to swim only inside the pool and not outside it. This is exactly the reason that the Gurus excluded ascetics from the Sikh fold,⁸⁰ and condemned all ritualistic, yogic and other-worldly practices and austerities. In Sikhism, moral activity is the basis of all spiritual growth, and this activity can be done only in the social field. For, such activity alone is the way to eliminate egoism, and test the seeker's progress. Keeping in view the character and role of the Gurmukh it is obvious that progress is possible only through moral life. "Singing and dancing in ecstasy are no worship; love and the giving up of ego are the ways of real worship." ⁸¹ "Drive out selfishness and one is fulfilled." "Where the weak are cared, there is showered God's mercy." ⁸² "Evil separates, good deeds unite." 'Service in the world is the way to be fulfilled.' There is, indeed, no spiritual progress without active moral functioning. The service of God is a synonym for the service of man. Moral activities have the

highest priority in Sikhism, these being the best means of training.

The use of human rationality and a sense of discrimination (Babek Budhi) have a distinct place in moral life. Sikh theology being non-deterministic, man has a distinct moral freedom and responsibility in the choice of his actions. It is this exercise of right choice that determines his spiritual progress. "By use of discrimination or intellect one serves God."⁸³ God's concern for the moral development of man can be gauged from the fact that it is "His innermost, nature to help the erring" "With, self-control and discipline, we forsake vice and see the miracle of man becoming God."⁸⁴

For the moral life of man two virtues, namely, humility and love, find the highest priority in the Guru's ethical system and the discipline prescribed for the seeker.

(c) *Remembering God and Prayer*: In the Guru Granth, there is considerable emphasis on remembering God. But, the remembering of God is by itself not enough to link oneself with Him. This contemplation does not mean yogic practices for the achievement of the so-called bliss as an end in itself. We are unaware of any hymn in the Guru Granth recommending yogic practices or any tradition in this regard. Nor are we aware of any hymn in the Guru Granth which, apart from recommending prayer and keeping the fear of God always in one's mind, directs the practice of day-long meditations in seclusion, and away from the day's work. There are clear hymns against the use of such a course as a means to spiritual advancement. "Everyone repeats God's name, but such repetition is not the way to God." "With guile in heart, he practises guile but mutters God's name. He is pounding husk and is in darkness and pain."⁸⁵ The Gurus deny the utility of any mechanical means of worship or mere repetition of words or hymns. But remembering can be a way to keep in mind one's basic ideals. Evidently, remembrance of God is a kind of preparation for the virtuous activities to be undertaken in the social life. It is actually the character of the subsequent

deeds that will be the test of man. This remembering is like keeping the fear of God in mind and moving in' life strictly on the moral path. It does not mean mechanical repetition every day or morning. That is why the Guru says that "it is only one out of crores who remembers God."⁸⁶

Prayer, as in any other theistic system, finds a place of eminence in the Guru Granth, Prayer, expresses the humility and insignificance of the devotee. It is a mode of seeking God's grace. It is a humble attempt to draw upon God's strength so as to restore one's sagging energies and will in the moral struggle of man. "My energies are exhausted and I am helpless. But O God, with Thy Grace nothing is difficult for me to accomplish."⁸⁷ Such a prayer is not a repetitive formula or practice, nor is it an end in itself. It is really a preparation for the moral activity to be undertaken in the world. In fact, it is inalienably linked with the subsequent activity. Without its external operation, the internal activity remains invalid. The very fact that the Gurus started no monastic system shows that they never advocated either -prayer or any other meditational system as an independent mode of spiritual training. "One is emancipated while laughing and playing in life and living a full life."⁸⁸ "The God-centred lives truth while yet a house-holder."⁸⁹

8. SIKH BHAKTI & SOCIETY

We have already come to the conclusion that in Sikhism moral activity is the chief method of spiritual growth. This raises two issues. The first concerns the approach of the Gurmukh towards social institutions and making changes in them. The Gurus, and more especially Guru Nanak, have been sharply critical of the evil socio-political institutions and customs of the times. About prejudices regarding caste and against women (which had received almost religious sanction), the Gurus say, "The Vedas make a wrong distinction of caste, colour, heaven and hell."⁹⁰ "No one should take pride in caste; foolish man be not proud of caste; this pride leads to innumerable evils. They

make distinctions of four castes, but all are born of God." "The whole world is made of the same elements. Then why make distinctions ?"⁹¹ "They talk of pollution and warn others not to touch their food, lest it should be defiled. But their own bodies are impure."⁹² "Why call women impure when without woman there would be none."⁹³ Evil social practices and customs have been denounced. God consciousness consists in treating all as equals. The idleness of jogis and ascetics, hypocrisy of priests and Brahmins, and inequalities in the economic field and the amassing of wealth have been condemned. "God's riches are for all men but men try to grab them for themselves." "God's bounty belongs to all, but in the world it is maldistributed."⁹⁴ "Man gathers riches by making others miserable."⁹⁵ "Riches cannot be gathered without sin and these do not keep company after death."⁹⁶ "O Yogi, are you not ashamed of begging from door to door for your food ?"⁹⁷ "The man incapable of earning a living, gets his ears split (to become a Yogi) or becomes a mendicant. He calls himself a Guru or saint but begs for food from door to door. Never look upto such a person or touch his feet. He knows the right way who Jams his living by hard work and shares his earning with others. "⁹⁸ Similarly, in the political field, the oppression of the rulers, the tyranny of the invaders, and the corruption of the officials have been deprecated.

The two important things should be understood in regard to this criticism. This criticism is the direct consequence of Guru's ideas about God and the reality of the world. Their world-view is clearly of life affirmation. The brotherhood of man is the basis of their socio-spiritual approach. Hence their three-pronged attack on all kinds of socio-political evils and inequalities, on downgrading the socio-religious status of women, and on idleness, renunciation and withdrawal from the world. Secondly, this condemnation was not a mere verbal exercise. But, it was an essential step to educate the people, change their ideas and build up fresh motivations. For, .an important function of religion is to create and "establish powerful, pervasive and long-

lasting moods and motivations in men."⁹⁹ Further change in social institutions could never have been brought about unless this calculated change in the moods and the minds of people had been brought about before that.

The second issue concerns the remoulding of social institutions and organisations, and the means to be adopted for the desired purposes. The Gurus describe God not only as the Helper of the weak, the shelterless and the supportless, but also the Destroyer of the oppressor. The sixth Guru clearly stated that his sword was both for the help of the oppressed and the destruction of the tyrants. It evidently implies that the Gurus contemplate reconstruction and creation of alternative moral institutions. Naturally, alternative human institutions can come up only by the substitution, remoulding or destruction of the old and unwanted organisations. The lives of the Gurus are a clear pointer that, in their system, change of environment to improve the moral climate in all fields is clearly envisaged and sanctioned. In any system where moral life has an independent validity and an importance of its own as a desirable end, the making of environmental and organisational changes for that purpose would ipso facto be justified. The Gurus accordingly envisage a change in environment and the remoulding of social organisations.

An allied important issue is the means to be adopted for bringing about the desired institutional and other changes. In God's world all form and progress are the product of force; since no change is possible without the use of force. Again, as all encroachment on the rights of others involves aggression, the same cannot be undone except by the use of an equal and opposite use of force. In fact, all action and activity, howsoever good, involve the use of force, because action and force are synonymous. Action not involving the use of force is a contradiction in terms. Therefore, except by some miracle it is impossible to bring about a change in the social or institutional environment without the use of requisite force. It is significant to note that in the entire

Guru Granth there is no miracle attributed to it Guru. In the Gurus' system, only the miracle of deeds are performed. Logically, it is impossible to construct anything without destroying or remoulding the existing structure. Of course, the force used should not seek to serve any selfish or egoistic purpose.

In the background of the Indian tradition this issue about the use of force as the means for a moral end needs some clarification, since a lot of confusion among some scholars has arisen on this score. The alternative to the use of force or killing and meat-eating is the doctrine of Ahimsa. Ahimsa has been advocated by most Indian religions, as was also done by Bhagat Kabir. But, it is of significant importance that it is Guru Nanak who opposed this doctrine. "Men discriminate not and quarrel over meat-eating. They know not what is flesh and what is non-flesh, and in what lies or does not lie a sin."¹⁰⁰ In his hymns, the Guru details his views concerning the issue of means and the cant about meat-eating. He chides the Brahmins for their pretence about meat-eating. He describes how the ways and processes of life involve the transformation and the use of the flesh. He also explains that life is present in every grain of our food and even in the fire-wood and the cow-dung which the Brahmins use for the purposes of purification. The Guru exposes the fallacy that life, much less a moral deed, is possible without the use of force. He means that immorality does not lie in the use of force, which is inevitable for all living, whether moral or immoral, but it lies in the direction or the purpose for which force is used. The significance and thrust of these hymns have often been missed. Evidently, from the very start Guru Nanak contemplated a change in the socio-moral atmosphere and institutions. The doctrine of Ahimsa was serious hurdle in disturbing or demolishing the status quo. Therefore, as a prophet of a new religion, he once for all made it plain that, so long as one worked in the midst of social life, all arbitrary prejudices against meat-eating or the use of force as such were wrong and meaningless. It is very significant to note that the religious systems

that insisted on Ahimsa were either ascetic or monastic, or suggested withdrawal from the world. The Radical Bhagats were neither monastic nor ascetic, but they never considered social involvement to be a duty or a field of spiritual training and growth. Kabir deems the world to be a trap from which deliverance has to be sought. His attitude towards women is exactly like that of monastic or ascetic religions. While referring to the Bhakti cults of India, Ray says that these had completely surrendered to the status quo and the socio-political establishment of the day. All we wish to emphasize is that no religious system that suggests the love of man as an essential part of the love of God can accept or suggest the limitation of Ahimsa for work in the moral or the social field. Ahimsa is inevitably linked with religious systems that have a world-view of life negation and are unconcerned with socio-political changes. It is, in fact, an ascetic tool, being the product or a part of an ascetic or monastic methodology.

It may be argued that great pacifists like Mahatma Gandhi successfully employed non-violence as the means of bringing about socio-political changes. But, it is now well known that when the Mahatma had to face a major challenge of his life, he found himself helpless. The Mahatma being the greatest exponent of non-violence in modern times, when the Second World War broke out, the pacifists of the world looked upto him for a lead. But the Mahatma could furnish or suggest no non-violent or effective remedy. Ahimsa could be of little help to him in stopping the holocaust. The situation became so frustrating for the Mahatma that he even thought of committing suicide so that if he could do nothing to stop the destruction, he would atleast not live to see the misery caused by it.¹⁰¹ The two occasions when he had to discard Ahimsa as a tool are quite well known, namely, when he agreed to the Congress accepting the responsibility of the war effort, and, again, when in 1947, he had no objection to the entry of Indian forces in Kashmere for its defence. Another great pacifist too had to take a contrasted

stand when faced with a crucial issue. During the First World War Bertrand Russel opposed the idea of war and violence to the point of being arrested in pursuance of his pacifist beliefs. But, later, after the Second World War, Russel himself suggested an attack against Soviet Russia before it became a major Atomic Power and a threat or menace to the entire world.¹⁰²

The issue needs some further clarifications. Reasons and force are two tools available to man for work and progress in the socio-political sphere. Without the use of both these means, it is impossible to bring about any social change. In fact a high sense of reason or discrimination is the chief faculty that distinguishes man from other animals. We have seen that the Gurus clearly indicate reason to be a good instrument of religious progress. "By the use of discrimination of intellect one serves God. By discrimination one is honoured. By intellect and study one understands things." "It is the sense of discrimination that makes one charitable. This is the right way, rest is all wrong."¹⁰³ "Man is blessed with the light of reason and discrimination." "One in fear of God and discriminating between good and bad, appears sweet to God."¹⁰⁴ Yet in the history of civilisation human reason or intellect has also been used as the greatest instrument of oppression and destruction. Human rationality has been called a convenient and clever cloak to cover man's bestiality. Does it imply that we should altogether discard reason as a useful tool for religious progress. We have already noted what is the answer given by the Gurus on this point. The fact is that both reason and force are neutral tools that can be used both for good and evil, for construction and destruction. The Gurus unambiguously accept the use of both of them as the means of religious functioning and progress. In doing so, they made major departure from the earlier Bhakti and religious traditions. But, this break with the past was the direct result of their new religious methodology and goals and consequent social involvement and objectives.

All consciousness or life is nothing but a centre of perfection,

deliberation, activity and organisation. The Gurus accepted life, the world and its responsibilities in toto. "Despise not the world for it is the creation of God," says the Guru. As the instruments or the servants of God, they had to carry out God's Will in helping the weak and destroying the oppressor. Their spiritual system, therefore, involved the use of all the available tools, including reason and force, for the purposeful progress of man and his organising consciousness. According to the Guru, the malady is not the use of reason and force, which can both be used and abused, but the egoistic consciousness of man, which is narrow and inadequate in its perception and partial in its outlook and functioning, because it stands alienated from the Basic Reality. Therefore, the way out is the development of a higher consciousness in order to become a whole man or superman with a sense of kinship and total responsibility towards all beings. The higher the consciousness, the truer its perception and the greater its capacity for organisation and functioning in order to execute God's mission. Man's greatest problems today are poverty, disease and wars. Undoubtedly, these need the greatest organisational effort in the socio-political field. The diagnosis of the Gurus is that the egoistic man has neither the perception, nor the vision nor even the organisational, moral and spiritual capacity to solve the problems of man. It is only the religious man with a higher consciousness, who alone can fulfil God's mission of creating the Kingdom of God on earth. The Guru indicates the path of progress or evolution: "God created first himself, then Haumain, third Maya and fourth state of poise and bliss."¹⁰⁵ At the second and third stages, man's development is only partial. The aim is the achievement of the fourth stage. In Sikhism, the development of union with God is not an end in itself. The goal is the development of a higher consciousness, so as to discharge the total responsibilities devolving on man in order to create a world of harmony and happiness.

The Gurus say that human problems cannot be solved at

the third stage of man's development. These can be dealt with adequately only at the fourth stage. And, this development of a higher consciousness is for a religious purpose. That purpose or mission is epitomised in the lives of Gurus. Guru Hargobind in his talk with saint Ramdas made it clear that what Guru Nanak had given up was mammon and not the world, the enrichment of which, in accordance with the attributive Will of God, was the mission of the Gurus, as also of every God-conscious man. In such a righteous world alone the problems of poverty, misery, disease, war and conflict can be solved. The development of superman is, therefore, the spiritual purpose, for which life has been striving.

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CHAPTER III

NATHISM

"As the words Nath Yogis indicate, Nathism' is a Saiva cult employing fundamentally Yogic ideology and methodology.

1. HISTORY OF THE SECT

Saivism's combination with Yoga has probably the longest religious history in the country. Seals of Siva in a Yogic pose have been found in the Indus valley or Harappan excavations. Siva is generally believed to be a pre-Rig-Vedic and Non-Aryan god.² He is also mentioned as a god in the Vedas, Upanisads and the Mahabharata.³ He is a feared god in the Rig Veda.⁴ Lord Krishna acknowledged his greatness and got a boon from him. The Nath Yogis belong to an ascetic group of Saivism.⁵ Asceticism as a spiritual tool to gain super-natural powers, has been accepted by all the old systems like Jainism, Yoga, Saivism and the Vedic religion. In the Rig Veda, the hairy Muni in ecstasy is extolled when he drinks poison with Rudra.⁶ The oldest Saiva system is the Pasupata. It has been mentioned in Atharvasiras Upanisad and the Mahabharata.⁷ The Nath Yogis are not only directly connected with it, but are also a part of the group called Lakula that has directly developed from the parent Pasupata. This group includes the Kanpata Yogis. The Kala Mukhas, the Kapilkas, Aghorpanthies, etc.⁸ In this group four elements are basic and common, namely, asceticism and renunciation of the world, Yogic methodology with emphasis on Mantra Yoga and Hath Yoga, the combination and worship of male and female deities, and the goal of gaining powers, liberation from the world, and

merger with Siva.⁹ The Kapalikas are the precursors of Gorakhnathis. Rather, there is no material difference between the two except that Gorakhnathis are comparatively a little moderate in their practices.

In all these systems there is emphasis on the combination of male and female energies, Siva and Sakti, Linga and Yoni, Purusa and Prakirti, etc.¹⁰ The female part is represented by Uma, Pchvati, Durga and Sakti. The group is noted for its wild, erotic and abhorrent practices and blood sacrifices.¹¹

As is well known, all Yoga, especially Hath Yoga, is generally done in order to gain miraculous physical and psychical powers. It is a very old belief that the Yogi can do anything and is the master of nature.¹²

The four elements mentioned above have been present in these systems from the earliest times. The worship of Linga and Yoni was there in the Lakula Group including Kanphatas. The Kapalika system which is nearest to the Naths has been mentioned in the Upanisads.¹³ The sect existed before the Christian era and the time of Kena Upanisad.¹⁴ The Kanphata line started with Matsyendra Natha, who is the first historical Nath. Gorakhnath is probably the third Nath, though some say that six Naths intervened between the two.¹⁵ It is generally believed that Gorakhnath appeared any time between the 11th and the 14th century. But according to Briggs, who has considered all evidence on the point, he lived in the 12th century A.D.¹⁶

2. LEGENDARY HISTORY

It is common in India that whenever a cult breaks away from the parent sect, the devotees of the new cult create numerous legends about its author by giving him both the highest spiritual status and maximum antiquity. The legendary history of Gorakhnath is very variant. One legend says that he is, the original deity and Siva, Brahma and Visnu are his disciples; another version calls him the Avatara of Siva, who appears in all Yugas. In the Satyuga, he appeared at Tilla-in Jhelum district,

Pakistan.¹⁷ But, the generally accepted legend about the Naths is that once Siva was imparting to Parvati the secret Mantra for spiritual realization. Matsyendra Natha, who was lying as a fish near by, heard and grasped the Mantra.¹⁸ Though Lord Siva is supposed to be the first Nath (Adinath),¹⁹ Matsyendra Natha is the first human Nath.²⁰ In that lineage, Gorakhnath is probably the third or the ninth Nath to get the secret Mantra.²¹ In the course of time this Mantra, it is believed, was received by Janeshvara, the famous commentator of the Gita, Chatanya and Tukaram.²² It is this secret Mantra which is possessed by Naths of this cult.

3. THE METAPHYSICAL VIEW AND APPROACH TO THE WORLD

Saivism has a variety of metaphysical views regarding the world. In the Pasupata system, the parent system of Naths, Ishwara and Pradhana are the cause of everything. Pradhana produces the world, or effects (Karya), including Souls. The effects are of three kinds, the soul (Pasu), 'Cognition' and 'organs'. The 'effects' are dependent on Siva, who is the cause of everything. But the effect, the created soul, is eternal. Siva is the original cause, on which the effects depend.²³ In the Pasupata system, the chief aim is to gain powers. The world, though real, is considered to be in fetters, from the bondage of which release has to be sought. In essence, thus, the Naths accept the philosophy and approach of Yoga, which is dualistic and seeks the liberation of Purusa from the meshses of Prakriti. In Nathism, too, the world is deemed to be a place of misery which has to be renounced as an entanglement. Irrespective of the fact whether Nathism is dualistic 'or monistic its approach to the world remains the same as that of Yoga. It is said that Siva being fed up with creation, cut his organ.²⁵ That is why the Yogis are ascetic and are associated with cremation grounds. The ashes on the body of the Nath represent cremation ashes. Siva is called Maha Yogi and has been shown in the garb of a Yogi. The Nath Yogis too take a vow of celibacy and altogether shun the world of man.

4. THE GOAL

Being basically akin to Yoga, Naths have a goal which, even though slightly variant in its description, is in essence, the same as in Yoga. In Yoga the goal is three fold, to gain power, to be liberated from the world, and to seek isolation. In Nathism, the first two objects of the goal are the same.²⁶ The final state is called Kaivalya or isolation of Purusha in a state of mindless unconsciousness. In Nathism, too, the final goal is of complete dissociation from the world, involving a wholly passive and blissful union with, or merger in, Siva.²⁷ The difference in the goals is in name only. In both cases, it is a state of complete inactivity. In one case the Purusha shines in its own light; in the case of Nathism, the soul shines in the eternal light of Siva. In both cases the primary object is to gain powers and seek liberation from the oppression of the world.²⁸

5. ORGANISATION, METHODOLOGY AND DISCIPLINE

Let us now give the rationale, the routine and the practices of the religious life of the Naths and the physical and spiritual discipline observed by them.

(i) The organisation: The Nath system being ascetic and monastic, they have a number of monasteries all over the country. The important centres are Tilla (Jhelum district, Pakistan), Hinglaj (Baluchistan), Dhinodhar (Kuchh), Gorakhpur and Devi Pattan (U.P), etc.²⁹ All Yogis are members of one monastery or the other, and each monastery is headed by a Pir or Guru. Since even Muslims are accepted in the faith (at one time there were over 38000 Muslim Naths), the heads of the centres at Hinglaj and Tilla, which are situated in the Muslim areas, are called Pirs. Actually, the head of the important monastery at Hinglaj was a Muslim, and the complaint was that visitors to that centre were converted to Islam.³⁰ Every person initiated among the Naths is accepted by a Guru of some monastery, of which the new entrant becomes a member. There

are twelve sects of Kanphatas. Each was organised by a disciple of Gorakhnath.³¹

The disciple has to take three important vows. He has to be a celibate. Further, he undertakes not to engage himself in any business, employment or profession and has to sustain himself by begging for his food. Thirdly, he has to observe Ahimsa.³² The Yogi is advised to live in a place where the area is not disturbed, the king is good and alms are freely available. There he has to choose a solitary place for his meditation and Yoga.³³ After the Yogi is accepted as a probationer, he is supposed to walk on both sides of the river Narbada. The period of probation may extend to anything from one year to a much longer period. When the person is finally accepted as a Yogi, his ears are split. By it a mystic channel or Nadi is opened up.³⁴ The Yogi travels barefooted. Except for the four rainy months, the Yogi is on the move to different Nath monasteries and other Hindu places of pilgrimage. He wears the scantiest of clothes and goes almost naked. He rubs ashes on his body and wears earrings in his split ears. The Mudras should preferably be of the horns of a Rhino. The Yogi wears a necklace rudraksha beads and also a special thread. In addition, he carries a whistle. These three items are called the Saili. The loss of any of these items involves stoppage of the eating of food till it is replaced.³⁵ The daily routine involves begging, and at that time he wears kerchiefs round his arms. The Mudra is so important that, if the same is broken the Jogi would not take food; nor can he perform religious rites or talk to his fellow Jogis, till the same is substituted.³⁶ The Naths bury their dead.

(ii) Monasteries and places of worship: It is of religious significance and merit to visit Nath monasteries, particularly, Tila, Hinglaj, Dharmodhar, etc., and sacred Hindu rivers and places of pilgrimage like Haridwar, Prayag, Ganga, Godawari, Benaras, Ajudhia, Brindaban, Badrinath, Kedarnath, Pushkar, etc. At the monasteries, there are temples, images and pictures of Hindu gods and religious personalities like Dattatreya,

Krishna and Gopies, Rani Chandra, Hanuman, Lakshman and others. Siva in the form of Bhairon is worshipped.³⁷ Homage is paid to Hindu gods. Dattatreya and Hanuman are also worshipped by the Kanphatas. In Bengal the Naths worship both Siva and Visnu. At their centres, blood sacrifices are done at the Bhairon temple and at some tombs.³⁸

(iii) Caste and social distinctions: In theory only twice born are initiated as Naths. At Tilla, the recruits are only from the first three castes. But, elsewhere, all castes, except some very low castes like Meghwalis and Dheds, are accepted.³⁹ Women are generally not initiated except widows.⁴⁰ Hindu Naths do not eat with Muslim Nath.⁴¹ Nor do Naths go for begging to Muslim houses or houses of lower castes.⁴² "None but a Brahmin ascetic can cook the meals and serve them at any of the ascetic centres extant today, whether Saiva or Vaishnava. Likewise the worship of the deity remains his privilege and preserve."⁴³ At Dhinodhar monastery, the higher castes are given uncooked food. The other castes are fed at the monastery hall, but lower castes and Muslims get food outside the monastery in the open.⁴⁴ Naths do not sit and eat with their women folk, nor even with women Nathpanthis. Many Naths do marry, but the married lot are held in contempt by others. The other Naths do not - smoke with them till they have paid a penalty.⁴⁵

(iv) Religious discipline: The Nath Yogis have four prominent elements of their discipline: (a) asceticism, (b) ritualism, (c) Yogic methodology, and (d) the combination of male and female energies and the raising of the Kundalini with a view to attaining union with Lord Siva. In order to understand these features, we shall briefly trace the history of each of them and indicate the Nath practices. It is relevant to understand that, despite the lapse of time and the modern environment, the Naths have not even slightly modified their practices which continue as of old.⁴⁶

(a) Asceticism: Asceticism is a typically ancient Indian institution. It is believed to be an Indian contribution to world

cultures, since asceticism was unknown to the ancient Irannian, Babylonian or Egyptian cultures. It appears to belong to the pre-Aryan or the Sramanic tradition.⁴⁷ Harappan seals represent Siva in an ascetic pose. Jainism particularly extols the power and value of Tapas.⁴⁸ In the Rig Veda too the force and merit of Tapas have been recognised. The Satpatha Brahmana says that God created the earth through Tapas. The epics and the Upanisads, too, accept the significance and supernatural powers of asceticism. This is especially so from the time of Kena Upanisad. Manu has prescribed the conditions and rules for the austere life.⁴⁹ In the Rig Veda, the hairy muni in ecstasy is praised as having divine power who could drink with Rudra from a poison cup.⁵⁰ Svetaketu was an Upanisadic philosopher, lawgiver and Jnani, a contemporary of Yajnavalkya.⁵¹ He too was an ascetic. Sanaka, whom libations are offered as a Vedic sage, was a Brahamacharya. There were many other ascetic Hindu sages.⁵² Even before the time of Buddha the theory of four ashramas provided that half the period of life should be devoted to ascetic living. Dattatreya, deemed to be an incarnation of Vishnu, was a celibate. Even Yajnavalkya says that wise men, without becoming householders, straightway take to the life of mendicant's. It was considered the right and proper course for spiritual endeavour and self-realisation.⁵³ Chandogya goes a step further, calling "Such brahmacharya as not only one of the pillars of righteousness but as a state that ensures Brahma realisation."⁵⁴ Mundaka Upanisad too recommends Sanyasa for final salvation. Even Yajnavalkya says, "Having known Him, one becomes a Muni, sage or wise one. Desiring the same end, recluses renounce the world. For that very purpose wise men of old used not to desire progeny." "With this thought, they used to take to the life of mendicancy." "For, desire for progeny is desire for goods." "Brahmins having known Him, practise the life of mendicants." "There are schools of asceticism which have raised the physical part of it to be an ideal in itself, whether as a contortive activity or as the esoteric Hath Yoga."⁵⁵

It is thus clear that both in the Pre-Aryan Sramanic tradition and the Vedic-Upanisadic tradition, asceticism, celibacy and other-worldliness have been taken to be the principal means of salvation and knowledge. Buddha did strike a mean path; but with him, too, world was a Dukkha and monasticism became a basic part of his system for Nirvana. It is this tradition of asceticism and liberation from the miseries of the world the Nath Yogis accept as an integral part of their system. Because, the vows of Nath Yogis provide for celibacy and non-engagement in any business or employment. Siva, who is called the Maha Yogi, is always associated with wilderness and cremation grounds. That is why the Nath Yogis have the ritual of rubbing ashes on the body, representing thereby death to their worldly connections.⁵⁶

(b) Ritualism and Formalism: Ritualism has a definite place and value in the system. Certain months, December to April, are considered auspicious for initiation into the system.⁵⁷ At initiation the disciple sits in a particular posture and faces north. Mantras are read at the time of initiation and splitting the ears. These are supposed to have distinct potency and value in preventing pain and bleeding in the process. Rhino earrings are preferred because it is a sacred animal.⁵⁸ The cutting of the ear has great potency and makes a person immortal.⁵⁹ In case the split ear is mutilated the Nath is excommunicated. In earlier years, he either died or was buried alive.⁶⁰ If a Mudra is lost, the Yogi must substitute it before he can take food, perform religious rites or talk to his fellow Yogis.⁶¹

As we shall mention under the sub-head Yoga, Mantra Yoga has a definite value in achieving spiritual advancement. Belief in the mystic potency of words and letters and their repetition is an integral part of the system. This is so especially regarding the word Om.

Fasting is considered very efficacious. It removes sins. Fasting on Shivratri is particularly meritorious and makes a person immortal.⁶² May be because of the black colour of Bhairon, black buck, black snakes and even black dogs are venerated. Nag Panchami is celebrated by the Nath.⁶³

Animal and blood sacrifices at the temple of Bhairon and some tombs are a common feature. At the annual fair at Devi Pattan, 20 buffalos, 250 goats, and 250 pigs were sacrificed on a single day. The fair opens on the arrival of the Nath Bir from Nepal who presides over the function. The mark of blood is applied to the devotees.⁶⁴ Kalaki Purana, which is a scripture of the Saktas, has a chapter on human sacrifices.⁶⁵ The Gorakhnathis have some practices similar to this group. Naths serve as Pujaris at the Sakti temples. Gorakhnath is said to have substituted animal sacrifice for human sacrifice.⁶⁶

At Hinglaj, Linga-Yoni mark is put on the visiting Yogis.⁶⁷ Visits to Nath monasteries and Hindu sacred places are regarded as of distinct religious benefit. A visit to Hinglaj monastery is necessary to make a person perfect.⁶⁸

The Naths accept and recognize Hindu beliefs in gods and goddesses, good and bad spirits, auspicious and inauspicious days, and many other superstitions.⁶⁹

(c) Yogic practices: Saivism and Yoga have an ancient bond or combination. Harappan seals show Siva in a Yogic pose. Both are a part of the Sramanic tradition. Dasgupta writes that Yoga arose as the means of deliverance of the hermits from the oppressive environment and the misery of the world. Its theory envisages that, as in the case of Jainism and Sankhya, the combination of the material and spiritual elements is a bondage, and release from the world has to be sought by breaking this combination. Another object is a state of eternal quiet, isolation and bliss.

The basic Yogic discipline is the one detailed by Patanjali in the period about 300 A.D. For Yoga, celibacy is essential. This discipline is eight fold, involving yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharna, dhyana and samadhi. It includes use of the word Om, fasts, concentration, one-point meditation and stoppage of mental processes, creating unconsciousness. As from the ancient times, the general and primary aim of Yoga is to gain miraculous powers. The Yogi is the master of three world and can control the evolution of 'gunas' of Prakriti.⁷⁰ Such powers

are called Siddhis. Yogis, who have attained those powers, are called Siddhas. Naths are closely associated with Siddhas whose principal aim is to gain power. For, Gorakhnath is not only one of the nine Naths, but he is counted as one of the eighty four Siddhas. He is supposed to be their teacher.⁷¹

Das Gupta enumerates four kinds of Yoga: Raj Yoga, Mantra Yoga, Laya Yoga and Hath Yoga. Raj Yoga deals with mind and its psychic powers and the intellectual processes. Mantra Yoga employs the repetition of sacred texts, words and letters. This Yoga almost enters the realm of magic.⁷² Laya Yoga is quietist. It involves elimination of mental processes and of inducement of trances and unconsciousness, leading to the final state, ending in permanent quiet of the mind. The fourth is Hath Yoga or Kundalini Yoga. The method is mainly physical and in its practice it uses Pranayama. The aim is the same namely, Samadhi, isolation or union with Siva. The practice of Kundalini Yoga also employs other Yogas, including Mantra and Laya Yoga. In fact, the practice of anyone of the Yogas also involves the use of the methods of the other Yogas. The general methods used are the ones indicated by Patanjali. The difference is only of emphasis. For, no kind of Yoga is exclusive in its character. The Naths mainly stress upon Mantra Yoga and Hath Yoga.⁷³

The three most important religious texts of the Naths are Goraksastaka, Goraksa-Paddhati and Hath Yoga Pradipika. The first of them is the most revered work of Naths. It is attributed to Gorakhnath himself. It suggests 84 postures and six stages of Yoga and gives 100 verses by the knowledge of which the highest state is attained. It prescribes Asanas and gaze between the eyes and on the tip of the nose. There are nine doors and those are presided by five deities. During the Yogic practice, Linga and Yoni are mentioned to appear, accompanied with great light. By seeing this light, death is over come.⁷⁴ According to the discipline, the Nath must repeat 1008 names of God every day. The Yogi sees, 72000 nadis below the naval. In Goraksastaka the nadis, Ida Pingala, Susumana, Gandhari, etc. and their courses are indicated.⁷⁵ The Prana is connected through Ida, Pingala and

Susumana. The repetition of the word 'hamsa' is prescribed. By the repetition of the Mantra 21,600 times a day, the Yogi gains liberation in a year's time or so. By the practice of Yoga even poison can be digested. The secret of Mahanrudta practice should not be told to anyone. He who knows Khetari Mudra is not troubled by death. The Bindu is of two kinds, white (Semen) and blood red (menstrual fluid). Bindu is Siva and Rajas is Sakti. By uniting the two the highest state is achieved. Om is the supreme light in which three worlds, three Vedas, three accents and three gods are situated. In Om is three fold knowledge, Sakti, etc. Om is the light in the elements of which the world, bhuh, bhavah, soah and the three divinities of Sun, moon and fire exist. Om, the seed should be repeated and uttered. Whether pure and impure, who ever repeats is not affected by sin. Pranayama, while meditating on the Sun and Moon, is recommended. In this text, the Yogic system, involving Pranayama, six circles, three channels and Kundalini and Nada and Bindu, is detailed. The ten chief Nadis are Ida, Pingla, Susumuna, Gandhari, Hastijihva, Pusa, Yasasvani, Alambusa, Kuhus and Samkhini. These terminate in ten openings. The first three Nadis are the important ones in raising the Kundalini. Susumana extends to the tenth openings. It is the path of enjoyment and bliss in which male and female elements unite. Kundalini is raised through the six chakras. Indra, Brahma and Kali with four-hands, a staff, wine skull and spear are involved in Kundalini symbolism. The final goal of Kundalini is to reach the top of the head at Sahasrara, the place of final bliss and union with Siva. There is Sunya, the place of Ishvara, the abode of Brahma. The union of Rajas and Bindu (Siva and Sakti) is the aim of Yoga. The thrills of the physical reactions in the process of Yoga are called religious experiences.⁷⁶

The aims of Yoga are immobility of body and mental process, the ecstatic experiences of union of Rajas (Kundalini) and Bindu (Siva) at the various levels and the six chakras in the body, supernatural powers, and final release and bliss. All these are secured by Asanas, Mudra, Bandha, Pranayama, retention of

breath and Bindu, breath control, cleaning of Nadis and miscellaneous practices. The other physical yogic methods adopted are Dhوتي, Basti, Neti, Trataka, mauti, Kapala bhati, etc. By Pranayama, Kundalini is directed to Susumana. During the process, one hears internal sounds (Anahatanad) in a year's time. Mental processes are brought to a stand still. There are many varieties in the use of Mudra, Asana, Pranayama, etc. By this yoga, all physical, psychic and mystic powers are gained and finally Siva is enjoyed in eternal bliss. If in wrath, the Yogi can move the three worlds. The union of Bindu and Rajas in the throat yields supernatural power. It is the gateway to final release. The Sahasrara is the true world, there one has the highest bliss. Mind is dissolved and unconsciousness follows. It is the fountain head of all creation where Kundalini enjoys Paramatman and Bliss. This is the Yoga prescribed in the Nath system. It involves all kinds of Yogas, but the stress is on Hath, Yoga and Mantra Yoga.⁷⁷

The question now is whether Hath Yoga is a later innovation, or it is basically a variety of the old and original yogic system. We find that Hath Yoga, in its fundamental form, including the system of Nadis and Kundalini, is very old. It was known to the Chandogya Upanisad which says that the soul departed through the Chakras gains immortality.⁷⁸ Not only is there a reference to Susmana nadi, but the theory of Nadi and its spiritual value is given also in the Maitri Upanisad. Tessitore writes: "The close alliance of Kanphatha system to the Yoga both of Patanjali and of the Upanisadas is visible from the prominent part given to the Yoga praxis as well as to the mystical theory, to the circles in the body (chakra, Kausala), arteries (nala), vital air (pavana) and breaths (hamsa)."⁷⁹ Similarly, Svetasvatara mentions the great gains of Pranayama. All this only shows that the Yoga variety practised by the Nath Yogis is nothing new. The system in its essentials was known in the ancient and the Upanisadic times. There is nothing fundamentally Tantric about it. In fact, the Tantric systems assume the basis of Hath, Mantra, and Raj

Yogas. Even the non-Tantric Vaisnava works detail the Hath Yoga.⁸⁰ After his survey, Ghurye also concludes that Hath Yoga in all its essentials is an ancient or an Upanisadic system.⁸¹

(d) The combination of male and female forces: The fourth element of Nath fundamental is the emphasis on the union of male and female energies, Siva and Sakti, so as to achieve liberation.

Both in the Hath Yoga Pradipika and Goraksa Paddhati which are Nath texts, (the former is attributed to Gorakhanath), it has been stated that the highest state can be attained both by asceticism and restraint as well as by sex indulgence. One of the methods prescribed for achieving eternal bliss or Siddhi is Vajroli, Sahjoli or Amroli. These sex practices, conducted in the company of a woman, lead both to Moksha and enjoyment. Mudras and Bandhas are similar to Asanas in their efficacy. Great powers are obtained by such like practices. Gheranda names 25 methods, including Vajroli, which confer magic and spiritual powers. By Khetari Mudra one gets ecstatic experiences beyond the range of senses; one becomes deathless and Karma becomes inoperative. The mind and Prana are dissolved in Samadhi. In fact, Raj Yoga, Unmani, Manomani, Asunga, Amaratva, Laya Tatvas, Paramapada, Idvaita, Sahaja, Niranjana, Miralamba, Jivan Mukti and Turiya denote the same or the final state of being or achievement.⁸³ It means bliss, isolation, union or merger with Siva or the Absolute. This is the final state in all Yogas, including Kundalini Yoga.⁸⁴ "By this Yoga, Siva appears as the vast ocean of bliss and knowledge, destroying the misery of the world, and the end is the state of the unmoving flames of light in the inner soul, a body of bliss and knowledge."⁸⁵ While tapas (hard discipline and austerity) have their place in the system, many of the practices are concerned with sex functions and experiences. Drugs also induce ecstatic states and there are methods for, it. Both Rig Veda and Pantanjali are aware of their use and utility. Patanjali says, "Perfections proceed from both, or from drugs, or from spells, or from self-castigation or from concentration."⁸⁶

There are three classes of practitioners; Pasu, the one seeking self control; Vira, the one who has gained self control and powers; and the Divya, who has reached the final state. He is then free from all rules of virtue and vice. He can do anything and indulge in anything he likes.⁸⁷

About the system of Naths, Briggs concludes, "The essence of the Hath Yoga is physical exercise and manipulations, quite mechanical. If it is charged against the exposition found in the preceding pages that it is overburdened with interpretations on too Iowa plane, it must be said in reply that both the practice and the outlook of the Yogis confirm this point of view.

This historical background of the cult of Gorakhnath points in the same direction. The high religious value to man-woman relations was insisted upon. The' first Chatanaya Sahajya movement confirms this point, as does Gorakhnath's early affiliation with Vajarayana Budahists." "While Vaisnavite movement emphasises love in the consort of the divine, the Saivite lays stress on her power of energy."⁸⁸

(e) Antiquity of Nathism: We are not inclined to agree with the view that this aspect of Nath Yoga arose under Tantric influence and led to Nada-Bindu combination. Even Briggs concedes, while referring to the times of Vedas, that it is clear that from ancient times drugs and sex stimulations were used for the same ends of ecstasy and trance."⁸⁹ The view of Tantric influence has arisen largely because of a suggestion that, before being converted to Nathism by Matsyendra Nath, Gorakhnath was a Vajrayana Buddhist. Apart from the fact that the suggestion is far from confirmed, this view displays quite an ignorance of the history of Yogic methods and Nathism. We have already seen that Kanphatas are a part of the Lakula group of the Saivas of the Pasupata system of which Aghoria Kalamukhas and Kapilkas are a part. In fact, Kapilkas are the nearest to Kanphatas, the essentials of the two cults being the same and similar. As such, this development of the Naths has to be traced to the Pasupata and the earlier systems which are much older than Tartric Buddhism.

Harappan seal and other sources testify celibacy of Siva⁹⁰ and his asceticism is vouchsafed.⁹¹ Siva-yoni worship is mentioned in the Atharva Veda. Burnett found a reference to Saiva Yogis or Vratyas occurring in the Atharva Veda. "He travels in a bullock cart, with a harlot, a musician, two carriers, and two footmen, and professes Saiva magic with great fluency."⁹² Harier says, that these Vratyas, followers of Rudra Siva and Yoga, stand included in the Brahmanic system and are mentioned in the Atharva Veda. These persons like Yogis stand erect for a year and go over the country (like later Yogis) cursing and blessing the people. They are accompanied by a woman. The couple represent the male god and female goddess, Siva and Sakti. These wandering persons appear in 800 BC before the birth of Buddha.⁹³ Bhandarkar draws pointed attention to the fact that Siva, in the form of Lakulisa, is portrayed with his organ erect. And it is in this form of Lakulisa that he is the tutelary deity of the Pasupatas. Bhandarkar further connects this portrayal of Siva with a similar seal-armlet discovered at Mohanjodaro.⁹⁴ Thus this sex symbolism and combination of male and female forces is both Vedic and Pre-Vedic. And in all its erotic manifestations is continued in the Kapilkas. This group is referred to in the works of the 1st century A.D. Bhandarkar believes, that the sect is mentioned in the Keno and Maitri Upanisads and is older than them. In the old Soma sect, Siva is represented as always with his consort Uma. The Kapilkas are known for their methods of sense indulgence for spiritual advancement.⁹⁵ In a dramatic skit of the 7th century A.D. Kapalika and Kapalini ridicule the systems of a Jain Muni and a Buddhist Bhikkhu and extol their method of spiritual attainment through enjoyment of wine and woman. Ultimately, the Jain and the Buddhist are converted to the ways of the Kapalika.⁹⁶ This shows that the Saiva systems hardly needed Buddhist influence for accepting erotic practices. It could rather be the other way round. The parent Pasupata system of this group is the oldest Saiva system, being mentioned in the Atharva Veda, Mahabharata and Atharvashira Upanisad.⁹⁷ Till recently, at the Amarnath temple, Nath Yogis danced naked, and women wore

only a single garment.⁹⁸

Another important point is that Dattatreya is one of the chief deities worshipped by the Naths. He is a Hindu deity, who is an Avatara of Visnu and is mentioned in more than one list of his incarnations. He was a celibate with miraculous powers and gave self-realising knowledge to great persons like Alarka and Prahlada. He is referred to in the Upanisads and is considered to be a Jnani and a Paramahansa. Dattatreya is the only incarnation, who has a cult following him and has temples devoted to his worship. All through, the Puranic account "depicts him as always in ecstasy, surrounded by women, drinking wine and indulging in sex." In one Puranic account, "he demands flesh and wife in a human skull." And he is one of the chief deities whom Nath Yogis worship.⁹⁹

The Hindu works also recognise that the highest achievement can also be made through wine and women. Hindu Tantra is supposed to be the 5th Veda of Kalyuga.¹⁰⁰ In fact, Tantric systems themselves depend on Raj, Mantra and Hath Yogas, which are older systems. The Mantra Yoga, as is known, is closely allied with the Vedic theory¹⁰¹ that words, verses, letters and symbols have mysterious powers and that man and the world are subject to their influence.

Ghurye has collected a mass of evidence to dispel the suggestion of Tantric influence on the Nath Panthis. He writes, "As Tantric literature is fairly recent it may be supposed by our readers that the Jogi order is of recent origin. This impression must now be countered." "Fundamentally the Jogis represent the oldest school of Indian asceticism."¹⁰² "The Yogis are the residue of the ancient Saivite Sects."¹⁰³

Zimmer also, in his broad survey of Tantric systems, concludes, "and in the deep philosophy of the Tantric, we have another sign of the resurgence of the religiosity of the non-Aryan, matriarchal tradition of Dravidian times."¹⁰⁴

Another significant fact which clearly shows the link of Gorakhnathis with the ancient Pasupata or Saiva system is the

wild and abhorrent nature of the two sects. The author of the Dabistan writes that Gorakhnathis use filtered excreta. He himself saw a Gorakhnath, eating the rotten flesh of a corpse. This practice is deemed meritorious.¹⁰⁵

Two other factors also show the lack of Nath connection with Tantric Buddhism and its antiquity as a system. It is admitted that Gorakhnath introduced some moderation in the Naths, both in regard to blood sacrifices and sex practices, compared to the extremes of the older Saiva sects like the Kapilkas, and Kalamukhas (though Aghorpanthis, also followers of Gorakhnath, are very extreme in their practices). Had he really the Vajarayana background, which according to Briggs is one of the most degraded religious groups, the Naths would have been more licentious and erotic in their practices than the Kapilkas. This they are not. Hence the improbability of Gorakhnath's being originally a Vajarayana.

Secondly, old religious systems like Hinduism, in order to maintain a semblance of continuity, developed a number of internal contradictions. Because, while attempt is made to account and absorb new developments, the older beliefs are not shed. This feature of contradictory practices is typically present among the Naths. Gorakhnathis while they take a vow of ahimsa, also indulge in blood sacrifices at their monasteries. Many of the Naths eat meat except pork and beef. On the one hand, there is a vow of asceticism and all concern with the world is given up by rejecting all business and employment, on the other, the chief aim is to gain power over the forces of the body, nature and the world. While the Nath takes a vow of celibacy, sex-symbolism, erotic practices and licensed indulgence are recognised as the path of spiritual achievement. And the person who has reached the spiritual height is above virtue and vice, being free to indulge in anything forbidden to the seeker. Such strong contrasts in Nath beliefs and practices clearly indicate an old tradition that has developed over a long period of time. It is not a new cult with a unified system of doctrines and disciplines.

There is thus overwhelming evidence to conclude the direct lineage of the Nath cult from the oldest pre-vedic and Vedic traditions through the Saiva system of Pasupata and K.apilkas, with both of which all its essentials are common. All the world over, ascetic or monastic systems, whether Hindu, Saiva, Vaisnava or Buddhist, at one point or the other, lead to male and female symbolism and consequent erotic practices, ultimately recognising sensual indulgence as a means to salvation. We should also like to emphasise that, where creative energies are not yoked to life-affirming, constructive and virtuous deeds, sects insisting on celibacy or adopting sex symbolism almost always degenerate into accepting erotic, licentious or abhorrent practices. This has happened both inside and outside India. On this issue, we agree with Briggs that, whereas female divinities have arisen all over and in all ages, no where in the world has male and female symbolism been able for long to keep itself on a high plane.¹⁰⁶

6. SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND THE WORW-VIEW OF THE NATH YOGI

The Yogi, whether liberated or other-wise, has no social responsibility. By his very basic vows he cuts himself off from the world. The liberated person is either above virtue and sin, or stops' all physical and psychical processes entering a state of mindless unconsciousness. His mystic union involves eternal bliss and rest. The question of any consequent activity does not arise. He has no social responsibility towards his fellow beings.¹⁰⁷ The Yogi is under a vow that he will not earn his living and would instead beg for his food-that being a part of his routine at the monastery. For his meditation he is enjoined to select a place which is not socially disturbed and where alms are freely available.¹⁰⁸ Evidently, this world-view is categorically life-denying and negative. It is wholly opposed to the world-view of life affirmation. The world is a place of misery, release from it can be sought by completely dissolving all physical and psychical processes of life. Applying the test of the unity of perception,

ideology and activity, the entire system and life of the Yogi unmistakably point towards a world-view of withdrawal from life. While the Nath Yogi expects the social system to provide him with abundant alms and an undisturbed solitude and socio-political environment and security, he, on his part, feels altogether no responsibility towards the society on which he depends. In short, in its approach to the world, its ethic, methodology, discipline and its goals, it is typically a world-view of what Schweitzer calls life-negation. According to the classification adopted by us, Nathism is a mysticism of rest, merger, or inactivity.

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CHAPTER IV

SIKHISM AND NATHISM: A COMPARISON

We find that the answers of Nathism and Sikhism to twelve issues indicated by us are mostly opposed in their implications. Sikhism is monotheistic, Nathism being a Saiva cult, also claims to be such, but leans more towards pantheism. In both cases the world is taken to be real. But, here ends the apparent similarity. As we probe further, sharp divergences appear. The two systems have entirely different methodologies, goals and world-views. In Nathism the world is a misery, and liberation from it has to be sought by vows of celibacy, Ahimsa, and non-participation in the affairs of man. The Nath cuts himself off from the world as far as he can, because his goal is liberation from it. Once liberated, the superman merges in Siva in peace and bliss. The discipline to reach the goal is all formal, ritualistic and Yogic.

The Sikh Gurus feel very differently. They say that by "despising the world one gets not to God" They consider the world "a Dharamsal - a beautiful place for all spiritual endeavours." As such, participation in the activities of man becomes essential. The responsibilities of the householder's life are freely accepted. God being the Ocean of virtues, He shows His deep interest in the world and man. Therefore, in Sikhism; the super man has to be the instrument of God in alleviating man's sufferings and solving his problems. God's will is attributive and man's goal is always to carry it out. The Sikh prayer is not for liberation from the world but for being given

millions of hands to serve Him., For God showers His Grace where the weak are helped. As to the spiritual discipline, there is only one method, the way of good deeds and deeds alone. The Gurus do not believe in Ahimsa nor do they preclude the use of force when quite utterly necessary. By applying the test of the unity of perception, ideology and activities this is the only inference we could draw from the lives of the Gurus.

Accordingly, we conclude that the two systems hold diametrically opposite views.

Not only is the contrast between the two systems glaringly evident, but every student of the Guru Granth knows that Nathism is one of the few systems. The approach, the methodology, the formalism and the goal of which have been strongly criticised by the Gurus. There are numerous hymns in which the ways and the ideals of the Naths have been denounced and the right ways and approach indicated. For example, in the following hymns the Gurus reject the formation of the Naths and instead recommend that virtues should be cultivated and practised.

"Instead of wearing Mudras and necklace of beads, carrying a beggar's bowl and staff and scrubbing ashes on the body, one should cultivate contentment and self respect, strive and always keep God in mind."¹ One has to control one's mind, keep away from vices, treat all beings as of one class and salute Him alone."² Again, "the spiritual path (yoga) does not lie in wearing mudras in ears and necklace of beads, nor does it lie in keeping a staff and a horn, nor in rubbing ashes on the body and making a close shave of head. Real Yoga (spiritual way) is to remain tranquil and balanced amidst the distracting turmoils of the world."³ "The spiritual path can be trodden not by mere words and talk, but by actually treating all men alike and as one's equals. Yoga does not lie in living in cremation grounds, doing one-point meditation or in roaming all over places or visiting places of pilgrimage but in remaining balanced and God-centred while conducting the affairs of the world."⁴

The yogic methods have also been clearly rejected, including

Neoli and other yogic exercises. The only worthwhile thing is the love of God and man and to keep Him in our mind. The rubbing of ashes on the body and other rituals have no meaning unless vice and egoism are given up and the heart is in tune with Him. The Gurus lay down that no worship of God is possible without the practice of virtues."⁵ "Good, righteousness, virtues and giving up of vice are the ways to realize the essence of God."⁶

In Guru's system "he who earns his living through honest means and shares the fruit of his labour with others knows the (Godly) ways."⁷ Parasitism in every form is deemed most despicable. The Guru deprecates "the Yogi who gives up the world and then is not ashamed of begging from door to door."⁸

In the Nath system celibacy is essential. Woman, as many other Hindu systems, is deemed to be a temptress, because the Naths would not sit and eat with even Nath women. But in the Guru's system, down-grading the woman has been denounced and she is deemed to be an equal partner in man's spiritual venture. When the third Guru created districts of religious administration, women too were selected to head them. All this was wholly contrary to the entire Indian tradition in which women had been given only a secondary place and generally considered to be an impediment in the spiritual path. In all ascetic and monastic systems woman has been dubbed as evil to be shunned. That is so even in systems that renounce the world either on account of Bhakti or devotion or for other reasons. But in the Guru's system, her role is significant and equal to that of man.

The Gurus emphatically reject the other worldly approach of the Naths. They deprecate renunciation of the world as well as one who does not earn his living. In all the hymns of the Gurus, the emphasis is on the shedding of vice and on virtuous living. "Love, contentment, truth, humility and other virtues enable the seed of Naam (God) to sprout."⁹ "With self-control and discipline, we forsake vice and see the miracle of man becoming God."¹⁰

A confusion has arisen in the minds of some students of religion, because the Gurus have used some words in their hymns which have also been employed by the authors of other religious books, but with a different meaning and import. For example, the Guru says that at the final stage of spiritual achievement one gets the bliss of Anhad Sabad or unstruck music. But this Anhad Sabad, as the Gurus call it, has nothing to do with the "Anhad Sabad", as used by the Nath Yogis. In the Nath Yoga "Anhad Sabad" is a sound which the Yogi hears when the "Kundalini" is raised through the Nadis and the Chakras in the body. This is a process which occurs at a far lower stage than the final one of bliss when the union of Kundalini takes place with Siva at the Sahassare in the top of the head. As such, the "Anhad Sabad" of the Naths, as Dr. Jodh Singh has also stated, has nothing to do with the "Anhad Sabad" of the Gurus which indicates the bliss one attains at the time of the final spiritual achievement.¹¹ In fact, the Gurus have described this ultimate state also with many different terms like "Nirvana", 'Turya', 'Mukti', etc. But these words have quite different import and meanings in the other religious systems where too these terms have been used. A close study of the Guru Granth makes clear the real content and meaning of these terms. These are Gurus own, and are quite variant from the way other systems use them. For example, Buddhist "Nirvana" is entirely different from what the Gurus conceive and convey by this term. They only mean union with Naam. Sometimes, the Gurus' use of these terms is only metaphoric. Therefore, the use of some words, also employed by the Nath Yogis, does not mean that the Gurus accept the Nath Yoga approach. In fact, the Gurus definitely denounce it. Though McLeod has been misled by such terms yet even he concedes that the Guru Granth does not mention the system of Ida, Susumana and Pingla which is fundamental to the Nath Yoga methodology. The Guru Granth clearly records, "I shall sing and imbibe the name of God and achieve the highest stage, I reject the methods of Ida, Pingla and Susumana and of the

union of the Sun and the moon (as in Nath Yoga, the sun representing Siva and the moon, the Kundalini). I shall reach Him otherwise."¹²

There is one more point of contrast. In Nathism, the method of sense indulgence is accepted as an alternative discipline for spiritual attainments. In the Guru Granth there is not the faintest suggestion of this kind. Rather Nath celibacy and its ill-effects are denounced. "He carries a beggar's bowl by giving up the world and women. But overpowered by passion he is infatuated by women of others."

In short Nathism and Sikhism present opposite worldviews. It is the compulsions and implications of each world view that lead the two systems to give opposing answers practically to each of the various issues raised by us. The fundamental difference is that Nathism rejects the world and life as misery. But, Sikhism accepts them as spiritually meaningful. Therefore, in Nathism withdrawal from the world, asceticism, celibacy, the downgrading of women, solitude, yogic methodology, etc., become naturally essential. Similarly, in Sikhism, God being Attributive virtuous participation in the world, accepting the householder's life and responsibilities, the consequent raising of the status of women and the love and service of man in all spheres of his life become logically necessary. Because, here the key test of spiritual growth and stature is the deeds of the person and whether or not the person earns his living through his own honest endeavour, shares his income with others, and treats everyone as his equal. In one case, the goal is merger or union with Siva, involving eternal peace and bliss without any role for the superman. In the other the goal is always to carry out the Attributive will of God and a continuous virtuous endeavour to solve the problems of man. There is hardly a meeting ground between the two systems.

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CHAPTER V

VAISNAVISM

Vaisnavism is far from being a unified or an integrated religious system. The reason for it is that it has not grown from the religious experience or the inspiration of a single personality or prophet. It is a grouping together of cults and creeds that are at times mutually quite at variance in their doctrines and essentials. Even the name Vaisnavism was given to this group only during the later period of its growth extending over two thousand years. In order to understand Vaisnavism and its various modes of worship of the Lord, we shall first have briefly to trace its long and chequered history.

The ancient systems of India were either dualistic, involving a multiplicity of Purushas without the concept of God in the theistic sense, or were ritualistic (Vedic), without the concept of a Commander issuing the Vedic commands. In the Upanisadic system, Brahman was conceived primarily in the monistic or in the pantheistic sense. In this system, there was naturally no place for devotion or a system of love as contemplated in a theism. For, in the Vedic system, everything including heaven could be obtained by the performance of rituals and sacrifices. In this context, the growth of a system of worship and devotion could appear only by the inflow of a side-stream and not as indigenous to the Vedic or the other orthodox systems. Having been accepted in the Brahmanical fold originally, only as an alternative method of Moksha, it later grew into an independent religious system, with doctrines and a philosophy of its own. This happened

mainly in the post-Sankara period, especially when the Alwar saints in the south and other Vaisnava saints came up in the north, the east, and the west of India. Let us see, how the content and the thought of the Vaisnava system developed and crystallised during its long history which may be divided into three phases; the first of the pre-Gita period, and the second of the period between the Gita and the emergence of the Alwar saints. In the third phase, Bhakti was deemed to be the major, if not the sole, means of salvation. This is mostly in the post Sankara period.

THE FIRST PHASE

It is now commonly believed that originally four streams of thought mingled to form the early Vaisnava system of the pre-Christian era when it was incorporated in the Gita. Probably, the oldest of them was the worship of Vasudeva who was the god of a tribe called Vrsni or Satvatas. One of the earliest references to it is in a Buddhistic text, where the worship of Vasudeva is mentioned alongwith over half a dozen other minor systems of worship, including the worship of a cow, a horse, an elephant, a crow, etc.¹ Vasudeva was a historical figure. The system of his worship with other accretions was called the Bhagavata system. This cult, which later involved the worship of Vasudeva-Krishna, had many non-Aryan and non-Vedic elements.²

The second stream of thought was connected with the name of Narayana, who had been mentioned as a-god in the Vedic times. Nara, Narayana, Hari, sons of Dharma, are referred to as forms of the Supreme. But, apart from reference to them as gods and the ritualistic use of the related hymns, there was no system of their separate worship. For, in the

Vedic period ritualism was supreme. It is later that the worship of Narayana began. Narayana was originally tribal god.³ Later still arose the worship of Hari as a side or subsidiary growth. In course of time, both these streams of the worship of Vasudeva and of Narayana and Hari, appear to have joined each other, though their complete mingling had not taken place even upto

the time of the Bhagavad Gita.

The third stream of thought arose from the Upanisads themselves. The Upanisads and the Bhagavad Gita are believed to be mere compilations of variant and unreconciled religious thoughts.⁴ In the Chandogya Upanisad occurs the name of Krishna, which name was later associated with Vasudeva as Krishna-Vasudeva. In the Upanisads, especially the later Upanisads, the idea of a Controller of the universe had appeared. But, it is there entirely in the context of the monistic or pantheistic Brahman, the Vedic ritualism, and the caste. In fact, the caste divisions had not only been accepted by the Upanisadic thought as a part of their overall ideology, but the system had been well formed in the Upanisadic period.

Though Visnu was also a Vedic deity, the theory of his incarnation had not been advanced in the Vedic times. All the same, his worship constituted the fourth stream that formed the system of Vaisnavism.

These four streams contributed to the thought of the Bhagavad Gita, which, being an eclectic compilation, also drew heavily on the religious systems of Sankhya, Yoga, Vedic Ritualism, and the Upanisads.

Originally, the worship of Narayana, Vasudeva and Visnu became associated with the religion of ritualistic sacrifices. This is probably the price these cults had had to pay for being accepted in the Brahmanical fold. Till the time of the Gita, neither the complete identification of Vasudeva and Narayana had taken place, nor had his being the incarnation of Visnu been accepted. Thus, Pancaratra Bhagavatism, we find, is the original and the chief source of Vaisnavism. The Gita had no organic connection with this earlier system which had been there since almost the fifth century B.C.

In the beginning, Bhakti meant only favour, fondness or kinship. Gods had Bhakti for men, just as men had Bhakti for gods. Bhakti meant merely a form of adoration.⁵ The view has also been expressed that the theistic worship of Narayana, and

later even the theory of the incarnations of Visnu, arose under the influence of Buddhism. Because, it was the Mahayana that introduced the doctrine of Boddhisattva and the idea of an Ambitabha and a Buddha who took birth in order to save mankind. As a consequence, also appeared the idea of devotion towards such a compassionate saviour of mankind.⁶

THE SECOND PHASE

It is practically a settled view that the Gita is of composite origin.⁷ Admittedly, it suggests different doctrines. The path of Jnana or knowledge, the path of ritualism or Karman and the path of modified Sankhya are recommended as different means for the achievement of the goal. In addition, the path of worship is suggested as an alternative method of Moksha. It is not the type of worship or emotional Bhakti which we find in the Bhagvata Purana, or as described and defined by Sandilya more than ten centuries later. The worship prescribed in the Gita is a mere form of adoration.

Let us first consider the place of theistic thought in the Bhagavad Gita. For this purpose we shall state briefly the Contents of the Gita and the systems it suggests. The path of knowledge is from the Sankhya and of Karma (Yajnas) from the Rig Veda. In the- Sankhya, all desires and actions are the activities of Prakrti. Hence the way to liberation is a realisation by the 'Purusa' that no activity is his. 'To dissociate oneself from that activity, is the aim of life. The so-called method of unattached action, a 'psychological impossibility'.⁸ is, thus, simply another way of expressing the same idea of disentanglement of Purusa from Prakrti. Man should not be attached to actions in the world. He should, instead withdraw himself (the Purusa) from all activities which are only the phases and forms of Prakrti with which Purusa should remain unconcerned. In addition. Gita gives religious sanction to the path of worship or Bhakti. In the Mahabharata the prominent gods are Siva and Visnu. It is stated in Chapter IV that 'those who know the incarnations and the

celestial deeds of Bhagavata are released from the body and are not born again; that 'Yajna of knowledge is the best'. The system of rituals and sacrifices is also fully rationalised and recognised. Sankhya and Yoga are linked with Sanyasa and Karam Yoga or meditational ritualism. By "following either one gets the fruits of both. It suggests that all worship and austerities should be devoted to God. By the Yoga practices one gets tranquility in Bhagavata. The devotees of Lord are of four kinds. Of these the Jnani is the best. He who dies while remembering Lord Krishna attains to his condition. By the Yoga practices, concentration and meditation, and by uttering 'Om' and remembering Krishna one gets Moksa. There is no return from that stage. Those who die while the Sun is in the northern course go to Brahman. Those who die while the sun is in the southern course go to the moon from which the soul returns. Through Yoga practices one reaches Aksara (Brahman) the highest goal. By meditation on the syllable OM, the soul hits the target of Brahman. The system is made theistic by Brahman being called Bhagvata. Those who perform sacrifices and rituals, attain heaven thereby. The value of rituals is, thus, recognised. One who adores Krishna single-mindedly, becomes holy even if one were wicked earlier. The Vaisyas the Sudras and women can worship Bhagavata. Those who meditate on Bhagavata reach him quickly. Those who meditate on Brahman reach there but with difficulty. If one cannot meditate and concentrate on Bhagavata, nor can remember him, one should do disinterested deeds. But, to this method the third place is given in the order of preference as a mode of salvation.

Modern research discloses that this concession to women and Sudras for admission to the path of Bhakti was given as a result of Buddhist influence, because Buddhist monasteries had been opened to Sudras, Vaisyas and women without any distinction.⁹ It is also believed that this opening of the path of Bhakti to women and Sudras was far from being a new thing or a concession. In the local or non-Aryan tribes, there was no religious prejudice against women or others. Therefore, for

Brahmanism, the acceptance of the status quo became necessary for bringing these tribes under its authority. This is also suggested by the fact that, as time passed, the religious prejudice against women and Sudras instead of wearing out became hardened. For, both Ramanuja and Shankaradeva (a very liberal saint), would not initiate women to the Vaisnava path.¹⁰ The former virtually confirmed the religious distinction between Sudras and others by opening only Prapatti to the low castes and closing the path of Bhakti to them.

The metaphysical position in the Gita is somewhat puzzling, as both pantheistic and dualistic views are indicated. As also stated in some of the Upanisads, God divides himself and forms the various beings of the world. In this sense, souls are considered identical with God. At the same time, the dualism of Sankhya and co-eternal Prakrti are recognized. The goal is an eternal life of bliss. All changes, qualities and actions belong to Prakrti, which is the cause of all of them, while Purusa, who is inactive, suffers. In this body is 'Purusa', the Supreme Soul. By meditation one can see it and withdraw Purusa. The final stage can be attained both by Sankhya Yoga, and by Karam Yoga. Others can do so by meditation. The Sankhya system and all the details of the working of Prakrti are fully accepted. But the atheism of Sankhya is avoided from being mentioned. It is also accepted by implication that since Purusa does not take part in the activities of Prakrti, man is absolved of all moral responsibility. Hence the emphasis is on concentration, meditation, mechanical remembering, withdrawal, ritualism, and knowledge, but not on ethical conduct as the foremost or the only way of salvation.

The diet taken and the modes of worship, sacrifices and austerities practised by one differ according to one's faith and nature, which are of three kinds, featured by goodness, activity and ignorance. This would seem to suggest differences of even diet among higher and lower castes. It is laid down that the duties of a man vary according to his caste. In the Gita there is a major emphasis on 'confirming and consolidating the caste system.

Not only has it been stated that the Lord made the four castes but it has twice been stressed that the doing of the caste duties of another caste, howsoever well done, or well meant, is not as good as the doing of one's own caste duties, even though without quality and worth. "Of Brahmanas, Kshattriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras, Parantapa, the duties have been distributed according to qualities born of their own natures." "Ploughing, protection of kine, and trade are the Vaishya duty, born of his own nature. Action of the nature of service is the Shudra duty born of his own nature." "Better is one's own duty though destitute of merits than the well-executed duty of another. He who doeth the duty laid down by his own nature incurreth not sin." "Congenital duty, O son of Kunti, though defective; ought not to be abandoned."¹¹

On the side of all phenomenal change, the Sankhya system and its twenty-four principles of change are accepted; so are Yoga principles and its meditation. It is the contemplative union with God that we find in the Gita, and the transition to it from the state of Yoga concentration is not difficult to understand. The earlier literature does not emphasize the emotional element in devotion. The kind of emotional Bhakti or love, which appeared in the post Sankara-Ramanuja period, is simply not there. In the times of the Gita, and those of Ramanuja, all that is meant by Bhakti or devotion is 'upasana', or meditation and concentration on God. The ideas of the worship and the grace of God are there. But the same were present, though in a faint form, even in the Upanisads like the Brhadaranayaka, the Katha and the Mundaka.

It is necessary here to indicate the mode of worship of the Bhagvata system which became, in conjunction with streams from the other schools of thought, the chief base of the worship of the deity. Pancaratra Samhita is the book on which is based the method of worship. The system is somewhat ritualistic and prescribes 'Mantras' variously arranged. Many rites are also indicated in the Satvata-Samhita. Shankaracharya details the

following methods of worship: (1) Going to the temple with mind fixed on the deity, (2) collecting materials for worship, (3) actual worship, (4) the muttering of 'Mantras', and (5) Yoga or meditation. By worship in this manner for a hundred years all sins are destroyed. As to the method of worship of Hari, there are six steps:-(1) Remembering Him, (2) the uttering of His Name, (3) salutation, (4) resorting to His feet, (5) constant worship with devotion, and (6) the surrender of the soul.¹²

It is significant that all, modes of worship are devotional, ritualistic and formal without any reference to social and moral conduct. In fact, in the Bhagvata system, Bhakti or worship was done in order to gain religious merit rather than as an expression of love for the deity.¹³

It is clear that the Bhagavad Gita gave few new religious ideas. In fact, it records all kinds of divergent systems within one compilation. The overall system and approach remains, by and large, orthodox and traditional. The duality and co-eternal character of Purusa and Prakrti are accepted, as also the priority of the system of meditation, Yoga and concentration. It is clearly mentioned that the Lord came to fulfil the law and not to supplant it. The rigidity and the immobility of the caste system are confirmed, sanctified and stressed, in so far as one must do one's own caste duties and not those of other castes.

Further, the sacrificial system is also regarded as a valid path. What is suggested is the worship of Bhagvata. This system had existed already. Except for the purposes of worship, the status of Shudras and women, put in the same class, is kept where it was in the Brahmanical system. The worship 'recommended is also of a formal nature in the sense that even remembrance at the time of death absolves one of all sins and ensures salvation.

Ramanuja defines devotion (Bhakti) as "un-broken contemplation of God. It is this contemplative union with God that we find in the Gita. In fact, the word Bhakti, as in the system of the Upanisads or of Ramanuja, only means mere meditation (Upasana) and not the loving devotion or love, which idea is

simply not there. Self-surrender in the Gita does not mean an ideal of love or of personal relationship. It is the ideal of contentment, non-attachment and self-control. It is the idea of the old Yoga of Patanjali, where also this discipline of self-surrender has been suggested.

It is, therefore, important to understand that the system of love, as in the case of Mahayana or of Sufism or of the Bhakti saints like Kabir, Namdev and others, is simply not there in the Gita, either as an idea or as a basis for future development. It is much later in the Bhagvat Purana that the different forms of emotional Bhakti are mentioned. In fact, the Bhakti system of love or mystic intuition through love did not exist before Sandilya. The Gita tended only to consolidate and bring in one compilation variant systems like the worship of Bhagvata, the ritualism and caste duties of the Vedic religion, the dualism of Sankhya-Yoga and its mode of isolation of Purusa from the activities of the Prakrti, the meditation of Yoga, and the monism and pantheism of the Upanisads. Das Gupta also refers to the syncretic character of the Gita where he says that it is a compromise "between the worldly life of allotted duties and the hermit's life of absolute renouncement." "On the one hand we purify our minds by non-attachment, and yet, on the other hand, we continue to perform all the ritualistic and other duties belonging to our particular caste or stage of life, i.e. the prescribed stages of four ashrams."¹⁴ The Gita laid down different paths of Moksha. But, the systems had existed already. While it gave priority to the path of Jnana and the meditational processes of Yoga, and accepted the ritualistic mysticism of the Vedas, it also approved of the formal and meditational devotion of the Bhagvata system.

In the Gita the ideal, by the very nature of things, was merger or salvation from the empirical world with the object of never returning to it. In life all one had to do was to perform one's caste duties that had been assigned under the Vedic and orthodox scriptures. Their authority was fully recognized as also of the overall social structure these prescribed.

. In the course of time, the four streams of Vasudeva, Visnu, Narayana and the Upanisad idea of a Supreme Soul combined to form one religion. To this was added the fifth stream of Gopala Krishna from the Ahir race.

THE THEORY OF INCARNATION

This theory is a basic fundamental of Vaisnavism. It portrays faithfully both the genesis and the growth of Vaisnavism as well as the variety of its trends and thoughts. It also explains the evident conflict in some of its principles and theology, and the main thrust and objectives of the system. Simultaneously; with the consolidation of Vaisnavism as a separate system, the theory of incarnation of Visnu came to be formed. The idea, believed to have arisen under Buddhist influence, is that God takes the human form in order to save man. This theory gave an impetus to the attempt at the integration of various religious systems and modes of worship, even though very divergent in their historical origin, creeds, or aims. The only thing common among them was the general acceptance of the Vedic scriptures and status quo in the social order. Slowly Visnu rose from a minor to a major, god. This cult served a triple purpose. On the one hand it gave recognition to the non-Aryan or local gods and included them in the Hindu pantheon. On the other hand, it brought within the Brahmanical fold many of the local and foreign tribes,¹⁵ and thirdly this enabled the Brahmanical priests to impose on these new entrants not only their authority and caste ideology, but also their ritual and religious practices. All Avatars are supposed to be the different forms of Visnu. The theory has become a noteworthy feature of Hinduism. It enables it to absorb other creeds by declaring their gods or prophets as the manifestations of the Supreme God or Visnu. In the Gita, Lord Krishna says that those who worship other gods also worship him, though imperfectly. The number of Avatars of Visnu rose from time to time, including the boar, the man-lion, the dwarf, Rama, Swan, Tortoise, and Vasudeva-Krishna. In the Bhagvat-

Purana this number rose to twenty-three. The mythical Kapila, the author of the dualistic Sankhya system without a God, is included as an Avatara, as also the Rsabha, the first Trithankra of the Jains who do not believe in God. By the eighth century A.D., Buddha was also accepted in the list of Avataras. It appears that, in Vaisnavism, the integrity of the theistic doctrine was hardly the concern of anyone. Similarly, in the apparently synthetic attempt of the Bhagavad Gita, the elements of the dualistic systems like the Sankhya and Yoga were included both for meditational purposes and for explaining changes life as the activity of co-eternal Prakrti. Among the Avataras, authors of the non-theistic systems of Buddhism, Jainism and Sankhya were also included. Evidently, to the authors of Vaisnavism, the only concern was to accept and to show Visnu as the supreme God. They were unconcerned with the unity or purity of its doctrine and theology, or of the modes of worship and the prescribed religious practices. In fact, heterogenous doctrines and authors of heterodox, non-theistic and dualistic systems were owned. It is, therefore, important to understand that, as against the equality and brotherhood of man and the fatherhood of God, almost inherent in any monotheistic system, the grading of the caste system and the social and religious segregation of the Sudras were kept intact, duly sanctioned and approved. One thing is significant. In the Buddhist theory of incarnation, Buddha has been taking birth even in the house of lower castes in order to save mankind. But, there is no Avatara of Visnu who took birth in the house of a low caste one.¹⁶ This would suggest that, while in the metaphysical or the theological stands there could be considerable variation, relaxation or diversity, there could be no compromise on the social ideology of caste. In addition, Vedic ritualism and the authority of the Vedas and the Brahmin priests were accepted by the new entrants. All this was maintained not only in the earlier Vaisnava systems, but also in the Vishist Advaita of Ramanuja and the later Vaisnavism.

Lord Rama was taken to be an Avatara probably in the early

centuries of the Christian era, though there was then no separate cult in his name. It was later, near the 11th Century A.D. that the cult of Lord Rama actually came into existence. Here, too, there are manuals giving the mode of worship of the deity, by means of Mantras, formulae and magic circles, quite like those prescribed in the Satvata-Samhita for the worship of Vasudeva.¹⁷

THE THIRD PHASE

Next we come to the period of Sandilya and Bhagavata Purana in the eleventh century A.D. The Bhakti these two describe is not the worship of or meditation on God as in the Gita. Nor does it involve formal singing. It is a deep affection for God. According to Vallabha, God invokes love in man. It is a favour bestowed by Him (pusti). In the emotional type of Bhakti, the devotee feels a sense of spiritual intoxication and joy. Like Chaitanya, the devotee 'sings, laughs, dances and weeps.' He is no longer a person of the world.

It is in the Bhagavata Purana that we first find the idea of devotion as the supreme source of bliss. Bhakti becomes by itself the goal. It substitutes the place of wisdom or philosophical knowledge. Such Bhakti is believed to destroy all the past sins of man. Thus, Bhakti becomes a Mantra or a type of magic. But, in all this, no moral action is stressed. The Bhakti of Bhagavata Purana is not the old contemplative meditation of God. It is the upsurge of feelings and emotions of love for God. The Bhagavata Purana mentions nine modes of worship. Each of these can lead to Moksha.¹⁸ These include listening to the praise of God the reading of sacred books, the repeating of God's Name remembering Him etc. The repeating of God's Name can bring deliverance. All these modes are ritualistic and magical. The important thing is that no moral activity is prescribed or emphasised. Idol worship is accepted. The Bhagavata Purana is aware of the three methods of salvation, namely, that of knowledge of works and of devotion. It not only accepts their validity, but also the Vedic scriptures and the prescribed social

system. The point of importance is that the goal of life and the role of the Jiwanmukta remains otherworldly.

Sandilya's definition of Bhakti not only prescribes it as the only mode of worship, but also distinguishes it from the types of worship prevalent earlier than his period, including Bhakti as indicated in the Gita. These old modes of worship, like the offering of flowers (as mentioned in the Gita), indicate only 'Shraddha' or faith. This new Bhakti is a loving affection. It is neither knowledge nor action. Sandilya and his commentator, Svapnesvara, attack the Vedanta doctrine that liberation or salvation arises from knowledge of the soul. This Bhakti has been described as follows. "The true method is 'bhakti', or devotional faith, directed to the Lord. This is the immediate cause of salvation. Knowledge is an auxiliary to Bhakti, and may become useful by washing away the filth of unbelief. But it will not by itself abolish the veil which exists between the soul and the Supreme." "In the highest form, it (bhakti) is affection fixed upon the Lord. Affection is its essence."

"Bhakti is not an action (a 'work'). It does not depend, as knowledge does, upon an effort of the will. Hence, as it is not an action, its fruit (beatitude) is endless. Every action, on the other hand, ultimately perishes." "The means are knowledge, concentration, etc. The end is Bhakti."

"Bhakti (or faith) is not 'sraddha' (or belief). Belief may be merely subsidiary to ceremonial works, not so faith. Belief is a preliminary or subsidiary to faith, but is not faith."¹⁹ This is Sandilya's definition of Bhakti.

Further, development of Vaisnavism started in the South, far away from the earlier centres. Dr. Tara Chand feels that this development took place as a reaction to the impact of Islam. But, this issue is not relevant to our purpose since we are mainly concerned with the nature and content of this development. A chain of Alvar saints appeared, extending over a long period of time.

In the following pages, starting with Ramanuja, we shall

briefly indicate the systems and views of the chief exponents and saints of this "new Vaisnava Bhakti movement.

Ramanuja: The successful crusade of Sankara in favour of his Advaita, under which world was Mithya or illusory, gave an ideological set-back to the need and importance of all devotional systems. For Sankara, Brahman alone was real. By this onslaught, the basis for the cult of idol and devotional worship was being eroded. This was also the period of the Alvars who constituted two classes, the saints, who composed the devotional songs, and the Acharyas, who were the philosophers and teachers of the doctrine. Ramanuja, on the direction of his guru, took upon himself the task of tracing from the scriptures, and the Brahma Sutras, the justification and basis for this religion of worship prevalent in his time. According to him, the world is real and there are three eternal principles of Brahman, God (Ishvara), individual souls, and the world (Prakrti). The individual soul and the insensate, world are deemed to be the attributes or body of Brahman, just as the soul has a human body. The three elements are different but the embodied parts, though different, are one. These three parts are inseparable and eternal. Before creation, the body of the Supreme Soul is in a subtle form. At that time, matter and souls are in Him, in an unmanifest form. After creation, He has them in His body in a manifest form. Thus, Brahman or God is both the material and the efficient cause of the world and controls it from within. The soul and the world are a mode of the Supreme, eternal but dependent on Him. Man is identical with God. As in the Gita, the system of changes of Prakrti for the creation of Ahankara, activity, etc., is the same as in Sankhya, except that God is there to guide it.²⁰

Ishvara has a wonderful celestial body with Lakshmi as His consort. Ishvara appears in five forms: (1) as Narayana or Para - Vasudeva, he lives, adorned with ornaments and gems, in Vaikuntha on a throne surrounded by Sesa (serpent), Garuda and other delivered souls; (2) as his four forms in the world, including that of Vasudeva to enable men to worship Him, (3) as

the ten Avataras, fish, tortoise and others; (4) as present in each being even when one goes to heaven or hell; and (5) as in the idols kept in the houses. For Ramanuja, the ritualism of the Vedas and the Brahma Vidya of the Upanisada are equally important. Rituals are not for a lower class of people, nor do they give a lower truth. He thinks that rituals prescribe the method of worship. These he accepts fully, as also the caste system. The doctrines relating to Brahman (Brahm Vidya), and that about rituals form one system. These are not addressed to different categories of persons as is believed by Sankara. For Ramanuja, Karam Marga includes the Vedic rituals, the worship of idols, and the repeating of Mantras.

Souls are of three kinds: (1) the bound ones, (2) the delivered ones, and (3) the eternal souls like Garuda. Of the bound ones, some seek wealth and others seek heaven. Some of them are devotees of Bhagavat and some worship other gods or Avataras of these who desire deliverance, some seek the consciousness of the pure soul (Kevalin) and others strive for eternal bliss. Of the latter, some seek God through Bhakti. For them the study of Vedas and the philosophy of sacrifices and rites are necessary. But, this Bhakti is open to the three higher castes only and not to Shudras. The caste system and Vedic ritualism are fully maintained.²¹ In fact, the dietary rules made and practised by this sect are very rigid and exclusive. Everyone has to cook one's own food. And if per chance another person casts his glance on the food while the disciple is cooking or eating it, the entire victuals have to be thrown away or buried as having been polluted.²²

But the Shudras can resort to 'Prapatti: or surrender to God, after renouncing the world. For the efficacy of Bhakti, 'Karma Yoga' and 'Jnana Yoga' are essential. The first involves the performance of all prescribed acts, rituals, sacrifices, ceremonies, pilgrimages, and the worship of idols. Jnana yoga means the gaining of cognitive knowledge of one's being separate from Prakrti and being an Attribute of God. These two preparatory steps lead to Bhakti which consists in meditations, accompanied

by the Yoga practices of Yama, Niyama, etc. Thus, for Ramanuja, the preliminary knowledge of Jnana and Karma Yoga is necessary for Bhakti. . These methods include: (1) the use of un-polluted and unprohibited food, (2) chastity, (3) constant practice, (4) performing the rites and sacrifices according to one's means, (5) virtuous acts of truth, compassion, Ahimsa, uprightness, (6) hopefulness and (7) absence of elatedness. Bhakti, as done by these seven means, leads to one's seeing God.

As against it, 'Prapatti' involves complete self-surrender. In the Padma-Purana seven other modes of worship are also suggested. They are all ritualistic and formal, e.g. (1) the imprinting of marks on the body and the forehead, (2) the repeating of Mantras, (3) the drinking of water used for washing the feet of the idol of Hari, (4) the eating of the cooked food offered to the idol, (5) the service of devotees, (6) the observing of fasts on the fixed days of the lunar month, (7) the laying of Tulsi leaves on the idol; etc.²³

This Bhakti has no ethical bias or emphasis. It is Bhakti of a formal nature without the kind of love that fructifies into a moral life for the service of man. On the basis of the study of Alvar saints, Hooper asserts that there is no necessary connection between Bhakti and moral character. In this regard, he particularly cites the example of one Alvar saint, Tirumangai.²⁴ Mantra, who has discussed the problem of Hindu ethics and the problem of ideal life in all Hindu schools of orthodox philosophy, including that of the Vaishesika, the Purva Mimansa, Sankara, Ramanuja, Madhava and Vallabhacharya, comes to the conclusion that a common feature of all these doctrines of ideal life or Moksha is "the conception of the ideal as a negation, or at least as a transcendence, of the empirical life proper, and that this state is thus a super-moral spiritual ideal rather than a strictly moral ideal."²⁵ And after achieving the state of Moksha, there is hardly anything to be done. It is a negative and quietist ideal without any activity, except that in the case of Ramanuja's system one has to do unconditional scriptural works like the daily rituals, bathing in the Ganges on the day of lunar or solar eclipse, etc.

As such, in Vaisnavism, the otherworldly ideal or goal has been accepted. It is a transcendental state of deliverance "from all the struggle of life. It is generally and essentially a state of quiescence."²⁶ In all these systems, including that of the Vishnu Purana, release from the bondage of the world is sought.

Ramanuja's Bhakti does not mean boundless love; it only involves Upasana or meditation. It is a doctrine of identity. Upto the end of life, one must carry out all ritualistic duties and duties of one's station in life, i.e. the caste duties.

Like the Bhagavad Gita, Ramanuja's Vashisht Advaita or theism is also syncretic and incorporates the chief elements of the Sankhya and Yoga, and of Vedic ritualism. The world and souls are the body of Brahman both in their manifest and unmanifest forms. On the metaphysical side, the system is broadly pantheistic, God being the material cause of the world, and, Ishvara, the souls and the material world being the constituents of Brahman. In a way, the system is also pluralistic, as souls and Prakrti are eternal. The socio-religious sanctity of the caste system is fully accepted and confirmed. The continuance of the Brahmanical system for the worship of images is justified. For Bhakti, the world has virtually to be given up and celibacy maintained. Full sanction is given to faith in the scriptures and the observance of Vedic rites and other prescribed pilgrimages and fasts. The worldly activity, including all moral life, is considered to be a movement of the eternal Prakrti, from the bondage of which release is sought by resort to Bhakti and meditational methods. As in all the Yogic systems, virtues are practised entirely with a view to preparation and discipline for meditation. Virtuous acts, as such, have no social content or ends. They serve purely as aids to meditation. In the social fields one has to do one's caste duties, and the word 'Karma' includes all Vedic rituals, idol worship, and other ceremonies.²⁷

The Bhagavat Gita the attainment of Naravana, the enjoyment of bliss and deliverance from the world. The system of training is the Karma Yoga, the Jnana Yoga and the Bhakti

Yoga (meditation). Though the householder could follow the path of salvation, the Sanyas Ashram prescribed in the Upanisads leads to speedy salvation. The tendency is towards otherworldliness. The person who has made the final achievement, is also obliged to perform all the prescribed purificatory rituals (Karma), like fasting and baths.

Madhava : In Madhava's system the separate existence of God, souls and the material world is assumed. Though God is the efficient cause of the world, all movement in it is due to the eternal Prakrti which is its material cause. The system is thus dualistic with a plural number of souls. As in the Gita, in substance, the Sankhya system is accepted, except for the addition of a Personal God. Madhava believes that God is a substance. The doctrine of incarnation is accepted. In his qualities and actions, the Avatara is identical with God. Lakshmi is distinct from God but is dependent upon Him. She is coextensive or co-eternal with God. Souls are of three kinds: (a) those fit for attaining bliss, (b) those eternally undergoing transmigration, (c) those fit for darkness only. Creation begins when God disturbs the equilibrium of Prakrit. Moksha can be attained through devotional service but only by a soul fit for it.²⁸

There are eighteen methods that help salvation, including (a) Vairagya or renunciation of the world and its pleasures, (2) self control, (3) self-surrender, (4) acquaintance with the lore, (5) attendance on the guru, (6) knowledge got from the guru or a Vaisnava, and reflection on it, (7) devotion to God, (8) sympathy for inferiors and love for equals, (9) the performance of Vedic rites without the desire for fruit, (10) the avoidance of prohibited acts or sins, (11) the knowledge of Visnu being the highest, and of the distinctions between God and the world, Prakrti and Purusas, God and the individuals, etc., (12) worship or Upasana, the hearing of Sastras, meditation, etc. These steps lead to the direct knowledge of God which is cognitive. The followers of Madhava use special marks, created sometimes even by heated metal, leaving permanent scars on the body.²⁹

The presence of the two classes of souls, that are not redeemable and are doomed to misery and perdition, is something extremely incongruous in a theistic system. For it virtually limits the scope of human freedom and divine grace. As no progress is envisaged for these souls, the system is partly deterministic.³⁰ The ideal is the attainment of bliss. For liberation, the knowledge of God and self-knowledge are obtained through the study of scriptures. For achieving such knowledge, meditation and reflection under a guru are necessary. Like Ramanuja, Madhava accepts the necessity of doing caste and ritual duties and feels that these should be done throughout life. The performance of any worldly duties or moral acts by the spiritually enlightened person is unnecessary. In short, here too the ideal of salvation is otherworldly. One has no socio-political role. The goal is achieved by doing scriptural duties, the study of scriptures and meditation.

Nimbarka: Nimbarka's system is monistic and, also, in a way, pluralistic. He feels that the world, souls and God are both distinct and identical (Bheda-Abheda). The first two have no independent existence, but are dependent on God. His recommendations for the modes of Bhakti are practically the same as those of Ramanuja. He believes that Brahman had in it the rudiments of the world. By manifestation, Brahman becomes the material cause of the world. The souls are numberless. By contact with Maya or Prakrti, the form of the soul is distorted. The nature of soul can be known by the grace of God. In this system, the Vedic ritualism, the theory of incarnation, the caste system and Sankhya are accepted. The approach is otherworldly. The object is for the soul to know its own nature. This is achieved by dissociation from Prakrti and by the grace of God. The worship recommended is that of Radha-Krishna. This worship is more devotional than that in the case of Ramanuja, but the approach to life remains otherworldly. Since the individual soul is distorted by its contact with Prakrti, naturally the system involves ascetic withdrawal from life.

Ramananda: All religions or Bhakti systems prior to

Ramananda excluded the Sudras from their fold. They had to do the duties prescribed for their low castes and rise in status so as to be born as Brahmins. Then alone they could tread the path of the Vaisnava Bhakti., Ramananda's reform extended to the effect that lower castes, if admitted to the Vaisnava fold, could dine with the other disciples. For the rest, the system is the same as of Ramanuja. Ramananda was originally a follower of Ramanuja and observed all the dietary rules prescribed for the sect. Once when he had returned to the Math after a tour of the north, his co-disciples objected to his laxity in the strict observance of the prescribed dietary rules. On the matter being reported to the head of the Math, the guru agreed with the objection and sided with the critics. In sheer disgust, Ramananda left the order of Ramanujas and formed a new sect with the only difference that the strict dietary rules were partly relaxed.³¹ Ramananda's deity was Rama with Sita as his consort.

Tulsidas: Though a disciple of Ramananda, Tulsidas's philosophy leans towards spiritual monism. Like other saints of Vaisnavism, he accepts the rigidity of the caste system, even though his guru Ramananda had, to an extent, relaxed it for admitted Vaisnavas. He is conservative and otherworldly. In his system there is no emphasis on socio-moral conduct.

Vallabha: In Vallabha's system, the devotee can continue to be a house-holder. He first took an ascetic vow but become later a house-holder. He says that God has Himself become the world and the individual souls, because the Supreme Soul was not happy while all alone. He decided to become many. The system, is, thus pantheistic.

Salvation is only through Bhakti. Though one need not give up the house-holder's life, the method of worship is entirely ritualistic, formal and ceremonial. Apart from the devotion of singing and praising God, the devotee should rise early, drink the washings of the feet of the idol, utter the names of Goverdhana and others, remember the river Yamuna, etc. Similarly, at other times of the day, there should be image worship and the feeding of the deity, accompanied by other ceremonies, like Aarti, the

ringing of bells, the blowing of the conchshell, bathing, dressing and the feeding of the idol.³²

There are no public temples, but each guru, who is a householder, maintains a private temple at his own house. At eight fixed intervals during the day, the devotee should visit the temple of the guru. The best stage of salvation is that of joining the sport of Krishna and Radha in the highest place of heaven, called Goloka. Vallabha's system is not known for any new ideas except that he has excessively ritualised Bhakti and made it open to house-holders. It is believed that Vallabha's devotion appears more dramatic than real.

Chaitanya: Born in Bengal, Chaitanya was a devotee of Radha and Krishna. He developed the emotional side of the Bhakti of Krishna and his consort. He composed songs, did fervent singing and ecstatic dancing. This was his mode of approach to God. His disciples included persons of all castes and even Muslims. For him the deeply emotional singing of the praises of God (Radha-Krishna) was the only method of Bhakti and salvation. While singing, the devotees would laugh, weep, jump and embrace each other in a state of emotional outburst. Chaitanya became an ascetic and a Sanyasi. His loud singing became so charged with feeling that he even swooned under the intensity of his emotion. For Chaitanya, Krishna is the highest god who is so beautiful that he excites love in the hearts of all. He remained too busy in his emotional singing, dancing and ecstasies to have any social involvement. Like Nimbarka, Chaitanya believes in identity with a difference between the soul and God (Bheda-Abheda). God Krishna, can be approached by love alone. Through continuous love, the soul becomes one with God, it comes unconscious of its individual existence, and is absorbed in Him. In spirit the soul is one with God. God appears in finite spirits. Thus, the soul is identical with God. The goal of life is the bliss of union in which the soul loses its consciousness. But actually they remain distinct. In practice, most of the 'Advaitas', followers of Chaitanya, observe caste

distinctions, but those who are recluses or Bairagis do not do so. At the time of taking meals, caste distinctions are generally observed and the cook is always a Brahmin.³³ The teachers of this system are all celibates. The life of Chaitanya illustrates the "type of Bhakti recommended by the Bhagavat Purana. Chaitanya mentions different kinds of love: (a) love with awe and reverence for His greatness; it is the peaceful, calm and tender love (Shanta); (b) love with the submission of the heart like that of a servant's (Dasya) for his master; (c) the love of God as a friend (Sakhya); and (d) the deepest love as of the wife for her husband (Madhura). The last kind is the sweetest and the deepest as for a beloved. Chaitanya suggests the last kind.

THE SENSUAL METHOD

There is another feature of Vaisnavism. The worship of male and female gods has led to erotic symbolism and ultimately to Tantric methodology. Ghurye has collected ample evidence to suggest that the method, as an alternative spiritual path of Moksha, has ancient and Puranic sanction. We may emphasise that devotional systems like Vaisnavism that lay emphasis on celibacy, and involve worship of a female deity and erotic symbolism, without human energies being channelised into moral and creative activities, almost invariably land up as advocates of the sensual path for spiritual achievement. This leads to unfortunate results and practices. This has happened in Buddhism, and in fact all the world over. This change has taken place in Vaisnavism too.³⁴ Even a modern Vaisnava saint too has recognised the sensual method as a valid, though a difficult and risky, spiritual path.³⁵ We may also here refer to the case of Dattatreya, the spiritual teacher of Prahlada and Alarka. The Puranic accounts "depict him always in ecstasy, surrounded by women, drinking wine and indulging in sex." "He demands flesh and wine in human skull. "³⁶ The Tantric Shastras have also been called the fifth Veda of Hinduism.

CONCLUSION

We have made a brief survey of Vaisnavism which prescribes Bhakti as one of the methods of Moksha. Let us now draw our conclusion about its thesis, trends, methodology and direction.

1. The Fundamentals: Vaisnavism has four fundamentals. Its basic scriptures are the Vedas and the Upanisads which also form the foundations of the extreme ritualism of the original Vedic system (Purva Mimansa), the monism of Sankara, the downgrading of the world as illusory, and the otherworldly and meditational mysticism of the Upanisads. While each sect puts its own interpretation of the Vedas and Upanisads, there is implicit faith in their scriptural authority and all that they stand for. Having accepted the authority of the Vedas, Upanisads and the Gita, it could not ignore their social ideology and related injunctions. For the first time, the Gita included the heterodox Bhagvatism in the Hindu fold and linked its system of worship to the scriptural authority of the Vedas. The result was that the Vedic caste structure was wholly accepted by this system of Bhakti. Actually, this social system and its ideology became the second fundamental of Vaisnavism to which it adhered completely. Ramanand's modifications in the dietary regulations were, perhaps, made, only as a personal reaction to his own conduct having been subjected to severe criticism by his colleagues and his Guru for his having violated some dietary rules. This slight change in the rules about eating only involved a virtual post-facto, justification of his own conduct, without in the least affecting the basis or the rigidity of the caste system. Evidently, this change neither formed an important, nor an integral part of Ramanand's religious system. This is also clear from the fact that Tulsidas, the chief disciple of Ramanand, strictly believed in the sanctity and the rigid observance of the caste system. Even now among Ramanand's ascetics, only higher three castes are freely admitted. Sudras and untouchables if and when admitted have to maintain and worship in separate temples. In the temples of the first three castes, they alone are allowed to

enter. In actual practice only Brahmins cook food and serve the deity,³⁷ The theory of Avatar hood, the third fundamental of Vaisnavism, was, as we have seen, only an omnivorous method of absorbing all kinds of divergent and heterodox systems in the Hindu fold. The ritualism of the Vedic religion became its fourth fundamental. In fact, Bhakti itself was completely formalised and ritualised. The method of worship almost became a system of Mantras. This devotion towards the deity never turned towards love of one's fellow beings. In fact, the fundamental acceptance of the inequity of the caste system and the formalism of Bhakti stood as a complete bar to any transformation of the love of God into the service or love of man and suffering humanity. That is also the reason that good conduct never involved any act of social morality or any activity to solve the difficulties and problems of one's fellow beings. Moral life, at best, meant only a sense of ritualistic or formal piety, without the least reaction to any social evil, injustice or cruelty, much less to any political oppression or tyranny; Accordingly as was observed by Hooper, Vaisnava Bhakti never involved any change in the moral character or values of the devotee.

2. The World View: No doubt the world is deemed to be real But, in view of the Sankhya-Yoga background and the ideal of Moksha or liberation from Samsara, the entire approach and the attitude are otherworldly. In Vaisnavism, the clear preference for celibacy and renunciation and its attitude towards women also confirms this view. The overall metaphysical view is either pantheistic or dualistic, where co-eternal prakrti is assumed. In the former case the world and souls are the body or qualities of Brahman. Brahman is both the material and the efficient cause of the world. In the latter case, it is virtually the Sankhya-Yoga system with the addition of Ishvara as a Personal God.. The soul for a part of Brahman. Even if the ideas of worship between man and God, and creature and the Creator, are mentioned, there is basic identity between the soul and Brahman, the former being a part of the latter. Generally speaking, in theism, the

world is the creation of God, it is not co-eternal with Him. Hence, whatever name one may give to the Vaisnava system, it is not theistic in the normal sense of the word; because even personalities like Kapila, Rasaba and Buddha, who held atheistic views, were declared as Avataras. Sharp divergence in the metaphysical views of its philosophers like Ramanuja, Nimbarka, Madhava and Vallabha is also clearly symptomatic of its assorted and syncretic character. In fact, none of its scriptures or its philosophers even attempted to reconcile its variant and conflicting thoughts, or give it a unified ideology or methodology. Evidently, this was really not possible, because its authority and theology are based on the Upanisads and the Bhagavad Gita which are admittedly eclectic compilations expressing different thoughts and doctrines.

3. Doctrine of Ahimsa: Though in its early phase Vaisnavism could not emancipate itself from the religion of sacrifices, yet later it accepted and stressed the observance of Ahimsa. Possibly, this change, too, occurred under Buddhist influence. The Visnudharmottara Purana, while it permits sacrifice for religious purpose, prohibits the destruction of even an insect or a fly saying that there is nothing so sinful as eating meat.³⁸ It is quite significant that the Puranas state that the four forms of Narayana had Ahimsa as their mother. In fact, Ahimsa later became a cardinal principle of Vaisnavism. Both Ramanuja and Sankradeva insisted upon it and disallowed meat-eating. However, Vaisnavism did not stop the kings from waging a war.³⁹

4. The Goal: The goal is Moksha. It means the return of the soul for merger in Brahman, or a state of bliss and union with God, without involvement in the world of man. The aim is not the service of God or man, nor is it the carrying out of His Will in the world. None of these matters receives any priority, the ideal being liberation from the tangles of the world. In life, the Jivanmukta has no social role to play, except that he is still obliged to follow all the prescribed ritualistic duties. As such, there is no stress on the moral life except for purposes of personal

purity and as an aid to meditation.

5. Kind of Bhakti : Another characteristic feature of the system is its changing concept of Bhakti. This change reveals both the growth and the goal of the system. Originally, Bhakti involved only a sense of favourable consideration, affinity, relationship or adoration between the Bhakta and the deity; it was indeed a sense of shared kinship. In the second phase of its history, the gap between the deity and the devotee widened, and devotion took the shape of a system of formal worship, including ritualistic and idol worship. This was the period when Bhakti was only an alternative method of Moksha, and the preliminary aid of Jnana and Karam Margas was essential for treading the path of Bhakti. This position continued even upto the time of Ramanuja. It was only in the third phase of its development that the feeling or the emotional element became prominent and central to Bhakti. It became virtually the sole path of liberation. This emotional Bhakti developed in two distinct directions. In the case of Vallabhacharya, it became quite dramatic and ritualistic, accepting, to an extent, erotic symbolism. This trend naturally led to some unsavoury developments. In the case of Mira Bai and Chaitanya, it took the form of extreme and ecstatic emotionalism, absorbing completely the entire being and the personality of the devotee. While dancing and singing, Siri Chaitanya remained so much surcharged with the intensity of his feelings, that he had hardly any time or willingness for anything else. The goal of life is to lose one's consciousness under the intensity of the joy of union. It is believed that he lost his life while in an ecstatic trance of such a union, Chaitanya suggested the Madhura (as between wife and husband) kind of love which he considered to be the deepest and most intense. But Sankradeva recommended the Dasya type of love (as between the servant and the master) because the results of the Madhura type of love, he felt, could be disastrous for the devotee.⁴⁰

In all these various forms of Bhakti one thing is common and significant. This Bhakti remained only a relation between Man and God and never flowed into the field of social

responsibility or moral deeds. It was a Bhakti which isolated the devotee from the world as much as was done by asceticism or renunciation. Whether this insulation and other-worldliness were due to the acceptance of the caste ideology, or to Vaisnavism's preference for celibacy and its attitude towards women, or to its faith in excessive formalism or ritualism, is beside the point. But, the broad fact is that this Bhakti remained unresponsive to and unconcerned with the social and moral problems of man. It did not accept the principle of the equality and the brotherhood of man, as is normally done under a theistic system.

6. Social Ideology: In Hinduism, caste divisions had become established and well-formed during the Upanisadic times.⁴¹ Either because of Buddhist influence, or because of the need for absorption of non-Aryan tribes, or because of any other reason, the Bhagavad Gita for the first time admitted Shudras and women to the path of Bhakti. But, otherwise the Bhagavad Gita emphatically upheld the social ideology of caste. Lord Rama, too, severed the head of a Shudra for doing rites not allowed to his caste under the Vedic injunctions.⁴² Such being the social approach of two of the incarnations of Visnu, Vaisnavism, thus, fully endorsed the social philosophy of Brahmanism. Even now among the Vaisnava Sadhus only Brahmins can cook food. In addition the worship of the deity is the sole preserve of the Brahmins. Even Ramanuja, who opened the system of Prapatti to Shudras, in a way confirmed the system of caste-divisions by closing the gates of Vaisnava Bhakti to Shudras and instead permitting them only to the system of self-surrender.

Systems that are ascetic or monastic have generally a harsh attitude towards women. There is little doubt that the ancient religious traditions of India were largely ascetic. Asceticism is considered to be a typically Indian contribution to the world, since this trait was un-known to the ancient cultures of Egypt, Babylonia and Persian.⁴³ In the early Indian tradition, woman had been looked upon as a temptress and an impediment in the spiritual life of man. In the course of time, the emphasis on

monasticism and celibacy increased in Vaisnavism. Accordingly, the position of women worsened in the social and religious fields. In Bhagavad Bhasya, Ramanuja writes, "By putting trust in me, even women, the Vaisyas or the Shudras, though sin-born, do yet go to the supreme state."⁴⁴ Both Ramanuja and Sankradeva, otherwise liberal religious teachers, did not permit women to join the Vaisnava order. Ramanuja denied the facility of Vedic study to women.⁴⁵ They were not permitted to mix with men for devotion, nor were they allowed to give up household duties and become nuns. The ideas of Sankaradeva on this issue were even more rigid. He stated, "Of all the terrible aspirations of the world, woman's is the ugliest. A slight side glance of her's capitivates even the hearts of celebrated Sages. Her sight destroys prayer, penance and meditation. Knowing this, the wise keep away from the company of women."⁴⁶ He did not allow women to join the religious functions of men. They did their chanting only in the courtyard, and that too not simultaneously with men. He never accepted women as his disciples, nor gave Nama-Mantra to a woman; nor allowed them to be nuns. Except on certain days, even upto now, women are not allowed to enter the Kirtanghar of the sect.

In such a climate the growth of the ideas of the equality and brotherhood of man could hardly be possible.

All the same, some of its saints like Sankaradeva relaxed, to some extent, the Brahmanical social injunctions against the Shudras. However, food cooked by a Shudra was not taken by a Brahmin even though a Vaisnava.⁴⁷ Vaisnavism, which to start with, was a religion of the wealthy and the elite, became quite popular among the masses. The chief reason for its acceptance by them was the simplicity of its methods of worship compared to the expensive and elaborate Brahmanical system of sacrifices and rituals.

It has been considered a meaningful coincidence, that the Bhagavad Gita, while it accepted women and Shudras to the path of worship, simultaneously gave religious sanction to the rigidity of the social system. The result was that Vaisnava Bhakti remained

intimately linked with the social ideology of the caste, including, as we have seen, its attitude towards women. Even an outstanding saint philosopher like Ramanuja, while admitting Shudras to Prapatti, considers women and Shudras to be sin-born. It meant that Vaisnavism, except for religious purposes, always approved of the social ideology of Brahmanism. That is also why, even though Vaisnavism laid stress on the doctrine of Ahimsa and non-meat eating, it permitted the kings to wage wars and sacrifice animals for ritualistic ends.

In short, Vaisnava Bhakti remained a system completely at ease with the social divisions and distinctions of the times and found nothing inconsistent between its deep devotion towards the deity, and the social discrimination against the lower castes and women. Therefore, in classifying Vaisnava Bhakti it cannot be ignored that in this religious system and its world-view the hierarchical or the graded social ideology became an integral part of it.

Let us apply the text of unity of perception, ideology and activity and trace the ideology and religious perception of the Vaisnava Bhakti. The major objective activity of Vaisnava Bhakti has been the maintenance of the caste system. Accordingly, its religious ideology, as reflected in the social field or its social activities as giving a clear clue to its religious ideology, point towards the same conclusion, namely, that its world-view, or its theism was not only congruous with the caste system but gave full religious sanction to it. For, even a liberal saint like Sankaradeva was never bothered about making any social change; his concern was only with affording religious fellowship. "He saw his vocation only in establishing religious freedom and fellowship rather than social overhaul. To trouble about the improvement of social conditions, perhaps, deemed to him as little profitable."⁴⁸

As revealed in its theory of incarnation, the aims and ideals of Vaisnava Bhakti have been quite clear and consistent during the long course of its history. The reason for it is its faithful

acceptance of the scriptural and religious authority of the Vedas, Upanisadas, the Bhagavad Gita and the Sastras. And Dattatraya, too, with all his Puranic descriptions, was regarded a Paramhansa and an incarnation of Visnu.

We, therefore, conclude that Vaisnava Bhakti is a class by itself. It is not easy to find its parallel either in the Indian tradition or outside it..

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CHAPTER VI

SIKHISM & VAISNAVISM: A COMPARISON

Our survey and the history of the system show that Vaisnavism is every way a part and parcel of the Brahmanical tradition and its complex of systems. As of all other Hindu systems, Vedas and Upanisads are its scriptures. The answers of Vaisnavism on the twelve issues are opposed to those given by Sikhism. Vaisnavism accepts the four fundamentals of Hinduism indicated earlier. In addition, it has faith in the mystic potency of words and Mantras. The theory of the Avatars of Visnu is, in fact, a Vaisnava creation and not a part of the earlier Vedic system. Probably, because of its faith in the Vedic system, Bhakti in Vaisnavism is basically formal and ritualistic, without its ever fructifying into virtuous deeds in the social field. The Vaisnava Bhakti remains confined to meditational practices, and formal and devotional idol worship in the temples.

But, Sikhism clearly denies the four principles of Vaisnavism. Not only is the scriptural authority of the Vedas and Upanisads repudiated, but the Gurus are critical of the Vedic injunctions. "The distinctions of high and low, castes and colour, hell and heaven, introduced by the Vedas are misleading."¹ There are numerous hymns clearly denying the Avatara Character of all Vaisnava gods.

Having rejected the fundamentals of Vaisnavism, the question of any similarity between the two systems does not arise. While Sikhism is strictly theistic, Vaisnavism is, broadly speaking, pantheistic. In Vaisnavism, the emphasis is merely on

formal devotional methods divorced from deeds. And this devotion involves an otherworldly life, leaning towards Sanyasa and celibacy. In Sikhism, the path is entirely different. Sheer devotional dancing is considered to be of no consequence.² It is virtuous deeds that are of the essence of the Sikh spiritual life. "With God, only the deeds one does in the world are of any avail."³

"Without good deeds no formal worship is possible."⁴ "Vice is our enemy and virtue the only friend".⁵ "It is by our deeds that we become near or away from God."⁶

The Vaisnava saints were too preoccupied with formal devotion to enter the social field. Not even one of them did so, nor did their devotional system permit it, much less prescribe it.

As against it, the Gurus insist on virtuous deeds so as to seek the Grace of God. The first Guru started the organisation of the Sikh Panth. The fifth Guru invited the wrath of contemporary Mughal ruler, Jahangir, for having blessed the rebel prince Khusro. Instead of paying the heavy fine he preferred to face martyrdom at the hand of the Mughal authorities. The Sixth Guru fought battles with the Imperial forces. The seventh Guru attempted to come to the military aid of Dara,⁷ the rebel against the then Emperor. The eighth Guru died very young. Aurangzeb suggested to the ninth Guru not to dabble in the socio-political field. But he rejected this suggestion⁸ and sought martyrdom by openly coming to the aid of Kashmiri pandits in defiance of the imperial policy of religious persecution.⁹ The tenth Guru's creation of the Khalsa and confrontation with the Empire is well known.

There is another major difference between the two. Vaisnavism accepts the sensual path as an alternative spiritual approach; but Sikhism rejects it outright.

The conclusion is evident that there is an obvious contrast between Vaisnavism and Sikhism on all the essentials of the two systems and the issues stated by us. The world-view of Sikhism is life-affirming and ethical. The world-view of Vaisnavism involves a virtual withdrawal from the world.

CHAPTER VII

THE RADICAL BHAGATS

1. INTRODUCTORY

The Radical Bhagats constitute another school of Bhakti. This group has also been called, though erroneously, the Nirgun Bhagats, or even the Sant tradition. They have been given a separate name because discerning observers feel that there is a wide gap between their doctrines and those of Vaisnavism. Similarly, there is an equally wide gap, if not wider still, between the Radical Bhakti and the Sikh Bhakti. This raises three issues. How is this system different from Vaisnavism, what are the special features of this group and how is it variant from Sikhism? The last issue we shall examine after considering the first two which will be dealt with now.

Unfortunately, not very much is known of the lives of these saints. A considerable part of the available material is replete with the stories of miracles performed by them. It does not give their precise views, nor does it give a helpful account of their biographies and socio-religious doctrines. Neither can the compilations of their hymns, made mostly about 150 to 200 years after the demise of the concerned saints, be deemed to be entirely authentic. Therefore, the need for some caution and sifting is there so as to make a realistic appreciation of the religious views of these Bhagats.

In this study we shall mainly deal with Bhagat Kabir and refer very briefly to saint Nam Dev. The reasons for taking up

Kabir are three. He is without doubt not only a pioneer in the field but is also the tallest of them. Secondly, he is typically representative of the group. Thirdly, comparatively, his hymns are probably the largest in number and have some authenticity, because these form the religious guide of the Kabir-panthis and Dadupanthis. For this study, we shall refer mainly to the Bijak, which is known as the Eastern or the Kabir-panthi version of the saint's Bani, and also to the hymns in the Guru Granth and the Kabir Granthavli, the Dadupanthi or the Rajasthani version.

2. RADICAL BHAKTI & VAISNAVISM

Vaisnavism, we find, stands on four pillars, namely, the scriptural sanctity of the Vedas and the doctrines these prescribe, the theory of Avatarhood of Visnu, the social ideology of caste, and the formalism and ritualism of its methodology and its devotional and idol-worship. Kabir emphatically repudiates all these fundamentals.

As to the Vedas, he says: "The Vedas and the book are two spread nooses; realise that thou are snared therein."¹ "Nine Bhaktis, Vedas, the Book, these are the cloaks of falsehood."² "The four Vedas are fictitious stories."³ "Heed not the sayings of the world or Vedas."⁴ "O, thou, that knowest Brahman, be not led astray by the Vedas and the world."⁵ "Renounce the Vedas and the Book, O Pandit, these are fictions of the mind."⁶ "O' brother, these Smrities are the daughters of the Vedas, but these have come with chains and 'ropes to bind us. The chain behaves like a female serpent and devours the entire world. Under our eyes this has plundered the whole world." Says Kabir, "I have released myself from this chain of Smriti."⁷ "The Vedas and Puranas are the mirror of the blind, what does the spoon know of the taste of the delicacies."⁸ In "Pipaji ki Bani" (Pipais another saint- of this group), the author says that if Kabir had not lived in the Kaliyuga, the Vedas in conspiracy with Kali-yuga would have thrown Bhakti to the underworld.⁹

True, there are some hymns of Kabir which speak well of

the Vedas, but his rejection of them is too categorical to suggest that he had considered them as reliable guides for the spiritual path.

Kabir is equally emphatic in denying the theory of incarnation or the spiritual character of Vaisnava Avatars or gods. In fact, he denounces the very idea of incarnation: "Maya has sprung from the mind, the ten Avatars, Brahma and Visnu passed away deluded."¹⁰ "There was no Mahadeva, no Krishna, no Mohammad, nor any Fish, Tortoise or Rama, etc. Dattatreya did not know the secret, he was vainly entangled in his appetites."¹¹ Kabir mentions the Avatars of Visnu only to show that they all are of no consequence or of any spiritual status. "Many the Ramchandras, so austere, who preserved the world; Many the flute-bearing Krishnas, but none reached the Whole."¹² They took the form of fish and tortoise and boar, they took the name of Dwarf; Many were the Buddhas, the stainless, but none reached the Whole."¹³ "On one side stand gods, men and 'munies', on the other she (Maya) alone. Indra and Krishna are standing at her door, their eyes hungry with longing."¹⁴ "She (Maya) ran in pursuit of Siva and Brahma and made both her captives."¹⁵ He calls Visnu to be the author of Maya. "Casting the angle of action, he has caught the whole world. I can annul his dominion and speed the soul across this ocean. I can make you fearless, test this mintage."¹⁶ He considers Brahma to be guilty of offence and thefts.¹⁷

Kabir's tirade against caste is very out-spoken. He says that all men have been created from one Light and from the same clay and blood. The same blood runs in the veins of the Shudra and the Brahmin. How can the Brahmin claim superiority, when they are all born the same way."¹⁸ They live from age to age who renounce all caste and pride of race."¹⁹

Kabir's condemnation of all kinds of ritualism and the formal worship of idols and gods is also quite severe. "Devotion, sacrifice and rosary, piety, pilgrimage, fasting and alms; these are cloaks of falsehood."²⁰ "By all his worship, not one sin is removed; by singing his praises one is drowned in the world."²¹

"O, Kabir, all spoiled Bhakti by laying stones and pebbles."²² "If by repeating Rama's name, the world is saved, then by repeating the word "Sugar", the mouth should become sweet."²³

Kabir's denunciation of Vaisnavism as a system is quite unambiguous. For he says that it is devoid of the real Bhakti of God. He even calls all kinds of earlier Bhaktis as cloaks of falsehood. Kabir's views are diametrically opposed to all the basic doctrines of Vaisnavism. He and his group of saints completely reject Vaisnava scriptures. Not only is the Avatara theory denied, but Lord Visnu and his Avatars are clearly disregarded. Caste ideology, dietary rules and ritual observances formed the basis of the social system of Vaisnavism. These were so much an integral part of the system that, though Vaisnavism subscribed to the doctrine of Ahimsa, it permitted kings and Kashatriyas to wage a righteous war. In fact, Arjuna was goaded by Lord Krishna not to shirk his caste duty of fighting for a just cause. Ramanuja, the chief exponent of Vaisnavism, was extremely strict in the observance of caste and dietary rules. In order to maintain purity, "all the Ramanujas cook for themselves; and, should the meal during this process, or whilst they are eating, attract, even the looks of a stranger, the operation is instantly stopped and the viands buried in the ground."²⁴ We have seen that Ramananda, who was originally a follower of Ramanuja, was censured by his co-disciples and the guru for suspected laxity in the strict observance of these dietary rules. Ramananda was enraged and this led to his break with the Ramanuja and the Math. As against the graded social system, and allied formalism being a sanctified part of the religious structure of Vaisnavism, Kabir and his group swore by the principle of 'the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man'. In fact, many of the Radical Bhaktas belonged to the low castes who could formally not be admitted as equals in the Vaisnava socio-religious system. May be, owing to its Vedic heritage, ritualism, Mantras and all kinds of formalism in worship have a distinct value and validity in Vaisnavism. The Radical Bhaktas not only discarded all that but ridiculed it. In fact, they attacked Vaisnavism and Vaisnava Bhakti as a whole.

Evidently, the two systems are so much apart, and even opposed to each other, that there is hardly a meeting ground between them.

3. KABIR

Before we draw any inferences, we shall give a brief description of the life and system of Kabir.

(i) Life: There is little doubt that Kabir was an abandoned child who was lifted and adopted by a poor Muslim couple of the weaver class. Kabir's connection with the Sufis in the early years of his life appears quite probable, if not conclusively established.²⁵ All the same, it is plain from Kabir's hymns that his search for and union with the Eternal are purely a personal achievement. He was not linked to either a Hindu Saint or a Sufi Pir. Kabir married and had children. A hymn of Kabir would biggest that he married twice. He calls his first wife ugly and the second one beautiful. He says, "It is just and proper that my first wife is dead."²⁶ To us it appears that the relevant lines only refer to Kabir having given up the way of the world and adopted the way of God. Kabir did not leave his home, nor joined a hermitage or a Khankah. But his hymns show that both his mother and wife complained that he was little interested in his profession; and that while his family remained poor and without even adequate food, he neglected his work and remained busy in the company of saints. No wonder the author of Dabistan describes him as a Bairagi. Undoubtedly, both Kabir's life and his hymns show a strong ascetic trend.²⁷ But, we shall detail this point while considering his approach to the world.

Both Bhandarkar and Mohan Singh have given ample chronological and other evidence to show that Kabir was not the disciple of any living saint. There is hardly any reference to a living guru in his hymns. This negative evidence is of great significance when we know that he believed in the sanctity and the importance of the institution of guruship. As in the case of Guru Nanak, the word 'Guru' in Kabir bani refers to God. This

view is also supported by Mohan Singh.²⁸

(ii) Cosmology: Kabir's views about the creation of the world are somewhat his own, though to an extent mythical. God created Niranjana - who created the world. In the beginning was Sabad. There is an impress of Word on all creation.²⁹ Desire was made in the form of a woman. Niranjana created this woman or Maya.³⁰ Everything grew from her. Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh were born to her. She also created three daughters for this trinity. Later, the world and all forms were created through them.³¹ Ultimately, everything will be reabsorbed in Him.

(iii) Idea of God: As is usual with non-ascetic saints, Kabir's description of God could lead both to theistic and pantheistic inferences. "He is all created things." "And the Lord Himself taking form."³² "From one egg of Onkar all world is formed." "Himself God, Himself the leaf that is offered." He also calls God, Absolute and Attributeless.³³ His description is quite paradoxical. For he calls Him both with and without Attributes, Personal and Impersonal, Transcendent and Immanent.³⁴ Kabir being essentially a Bhagat, many of his hymns clearly point to a loving adoration of a Personal God. He calls Him "Father" and "Mother". He says, "Kabir has found the Elixir of love."³⁵ And love can be expressed only towards a Personal God. "I play with God and there is no separation."³⁶ "There is no one Liberal like You and sinner like me."³⁷ Kabir's metaphysical thoughts, like those of the Sufis would appear to be pantheistic, but like the Sufis', he too believes in a personal and loving relationship with Him. In one of his Ramainis, he takes a clear theistic stand. For, he rejects that there is identity between man and God at the final stage, as suggested by Chandogaya Upanisad in its phrase "That thou art." From the overall point of view, the monotheism of Kabir and other Radical Bhagats appears clear. The reason for the seeming ambiguity is that descriptions of mystic experience, which is non-sensory, can at best be symbolic. And, such symbolic descriptions, being inadequate are liable to be misunderstood or misinterpreted.

Kabir states that God is immanent and is present in all hearts. As such, it is possible to have a personal relationship of union with Him.³⁹ This is the only worthwhile goal for man. Kabir so often claims such a blissful union.

(iv) Goal: For Kabir the goal of life is to have a blissful union with God. In this union, the personality almost disappears. Kabir says, "I have attained the Supreme State". Even after the union the identity of the mystic remains separate. "I am a fish in God's water."⁴⁰ It is an intuitive realisation, a union of soul and God. It is a love as of wife for her husband.

Kabir's cosmogenic utterances show similarity with both Muslim and Hindu thought. But, his description of the ascent to God is distinctly of the Sufi character and resembles that given by Hallaj. "Abandoning the actions pertaining to humanity (nasut), one sees the sphere of angels (Malakut), then leaving even the sphere of Majesty (Jabarut) one gets the vision of divinity (lahut); but when these four are left behind, then comes "Lahut", where there is no death or separation and where Yama (God of death) finds no entrance. Humanity (Nasut) is darkness, Malaku is angelic, in Jabarut shines the Majestic Light (Nurjalal), in Lahut one finds Beautiful Light (Nurjamaal) and in Habut is the dwelling place of Truth (Haq)."⁴¹ Kabir's four stages of Bhakti have also been compared to the four stages of Sufi Ibadat i.e., of Shariat, Tarikat, Haqiqat and Marfat.⁴² It is without doubt that many of Kabir's views are identical with Sufi thought and practices.

(v) Approach to the World: Kabir's approach to the world is very revealing of his religious thought. Here too his views about the reality of the world are ambiguous. There are many statements of Kabir that suggest that the world is not real. "Nothing in the world is true and real. It is all illusory."⁴³ He calls it a dream or a hallucination. "The play is false. The player is true."⁴⁴ "This world is but a trafficking in phantoms. At the end, there is nothing at all."⁴⁵ "It is the shadow of a cloud."⁴⁶ Once when asked whether or not the world was real, he replied, "Can Rajaram cook cakes of ice ? Can man in his senses eat

them ? Can a lion seated in his den prepare betel ? Can a mammoth rat serve it when made up? Can a mouse sing a song of rejoicing from house to house ? Can a tortoise blow a shell ?, etc."⁴⁷ This reply and many of his other statements would show that the world is not real. But, we have already quoted many of Kabir's pantheistic statements like, "He is all created things." Such an ambiguous approach towards the world is not peculiar to Kabir; it is so with the Sufis and also many quietist mystics like Eckhart.

But, there is one point on which Kabir is very vocal, repetitive, and emphatic. There are numerous hymns which suggest that the world is a trap laid for man to divert him from the true path of union with God. Kabir thinks the world to be Maya, but his idea of Maya is different from that of Sankara. He repeatedly likens Maya to a woman whose role is to entice man on to the wrong path. Kabir never looks upon the activities of the world to be worthwhile. In fact, he finds the world almost a place of misery and a vale of tears. "The guru of this Kalyug is full of viles; by the robbery he practices, he slew the whole world."⁴⁸ As stated earlier, Kabir deems Niranjana, whom he also calls Kal and Kal Purash, to be the creator of the world.⁴⁹ Kal and Maya, he says, separate man from God, and both strive to mislead man and Bhagats away from God. It is Niranjana who created a woman or Maya, and both try to entangle man in the vicious ways of the world.⁵⁰ Kabir virtually attributes to Kal and Maya the same role as is attributed to Satan, who is out to entice and mislead man. Kabir says, "First desire was made in the form of a woman, Gayatri."⁵¹ "One woman (Maya) deludes and devours all men." "One woman has spread her' net, fear overcomes all men."⁵² "There is a roof of falsehood, it spreads over the earth and sky. In all the religions it has beset the soul."⁵³ "I kill, I burn, I devour, my name is Niranjana."⁵⁴ "Having a serpent noose within her, she has plundered and devoured all the world."⁵⁵ "Maya sportingly plays the temptress, the whole world she has taken captive."⁵⁶ "God men, munis, deities,

Gorakh, Datta and Vyas, Sanaka and Sananda lost at the game, what hope have others."⁵⁷ "I shall escape from the world untrammelled."⁵⁸ "Maya is mad and she goes forth to hunt for the prey. The wise and polished she chose and slew. She has not spared the ascetic, the yogi, deep in his meditation, the Jangam in the jungle, Swami doing worship, Machhindarnath and others."⁵⁹ "Maya is the serpent wife that preys on the world." "The woman's (Maya's) husband knows not the shame."⁶⁰ "On one side stand gods and munis, on the other side is she alone."⁶¹ "The three worlds are a cage, virtue and vice, a net, all souls become a prey, there 'is one hunter, Kal."⁶² "I saw the whole world burning, each one in his own fire."⁶³ "Never did I meet the man with whom I might link myself."⁶⁴ "Liars keep company with liars, and robbers deal with robbers. The three worlds are full of such persons. There is no one to be trusted."⁶⁵ Kabir remains a very solitary person. "In the whole Brahmand (universe), Kabir is the only swan, the rest are crows with open beaks."⁶⁶

"The very significant and important thing is that, in Kabir's view, Maya deliberately entices and bewitches man on to sinful ways. The world is a phantom-play and Maya stands between man and God. All his statements-suggest that there is virtually a definite conspiracy deliberately to lure the simple man into false and evil ways and to destroy him. Repeatedly, Kabir warns man to escape from the bondage and the destructive tentacles of the world. Kabir has almost contempt for it. Though at times Kabir condemns ascetic methods, but all his above statements show a very strong ascetic bias and an excessive otherworldly approach. Hence his repeated warnings to others to escape from the grip of Maya. Such being the views of Kabir, no wonder he neither took any step to organise any religious institution, nor evinced any interest in the social affairs around him. Such views are, indeed, quite akin to those of Sufis. His attitude is almost like the "tauba" of Sufis which involves abstinence, renunciation and solitariness. Like the Sufis, Kabir married, -but like them he remained cut off from the main stream of life.

(vi) Methodology: Kabir believes in self-surrender and God's Bhakti. The Kabir Panthis follow a life of singing the praises of God, prayers and a simple and pure life of devotion. Kabir recommends ceaseless singing of God's praises.⁶⁷ He virtually suggests withdrawal from the world. He is against all ritualistic and ascetic methods as the means to salvation. It is true that Kabir refers to some Yogic terms in describing the meditational and mystic methods of the Yogis. But, there is no ground to suggest that he himself recommends the yogic path. In fact, far from recommending Yoga, he is quite strong in condemning ascetic or Yogic methods and says that Yogis in their meditations become prey to Maya. The point will, however be considered further while comparing Radical Bhakti with Nathism.

The moral tone is quite strong in Kabir's hymns. "Kabir deck thyself with garments of love. To them is given honour whose body and soul speak the truth."⁶⁸ "The ruby of goodness is greater than all the mines of rubies; all the wealth of three worlds resides in the goodness of heart. When the wealth of contentment is won, all other wealth is as dust."⁶⁹ "Where there is mercy, there is strength, where there is forgiveness, there is He."⁷⁰ "The man who is kind and practises righteousness, who remains passive in the affairs of the world, who considers creatures of the world as his own self, he attains the immortal Being; the true God is ever with him."⁷¹ Kabir suggests inward worship and remembrance of God. For him true worship is only inwards. "Put on the rosary inward. By counting beads, the world will be full of light." He clearly suggests moral discrimination between good and bad deeds. "What can the helpless road do, when the traveler does not walk understandingly."⁷² "What can one do, if, with lamp in hand, one falls in the well,"⁷³ "or goes astray with open eyes." "Discern Ye now between good and evil."⁷⁴

Kabir is firm advocate of Ahimsa. His doctrine extends even to the non-destruction of flowers. "The life of the living you strike dead and you say your slaughter makes it dedicated. It is

blood haunting you and those who taught you."⁷⁵ "They fast all day and at night, they slaughter cow; here murder, there devotion; how can this please God ? O' Kazi, by whose order doth thou use knife."⁷⁶ "When you declare the sacrifice of an animal as your religion, what else is sin ? If you regard yourself a saint, whom will you call a butcher ?"⁷⁷ "The goat eats grass and is skinned, what will happen to those who eat (goat's) meat ?"⁷⁸ "Do not kill poor jiva, murder will not be forgiven even if you hear a million Puranas."⁷⁹ Among the fifty commandments laid down for the followers of Kabir, non-meat eating is one of them.⁸⁰ For Kabir moral life involves adherence to Ahimsa.

In common with all monastic, ascetic or other worldly sects, Kabir does not think well of women. There is almost a tirade against them in the hymns of Kabir. Woman is characterised as a black cobra, "the pit of hell" and the "refuse of the world."⁸¹ She is considered to be a hurdle in the path of the spiritual progress of man. He spoke, "Woman ruins every thing when she comes near a man; Devotion, salvation and divine knowledge no longer enter his soul."⁸² Schomer and O' Flaherty find a misogynist bias in the hymns of Kabir.⁸³ His views about woman are also evident from all his vehement attacks' against Maya. Almost everywhere he likens Maya to a woman who is out to entice and entrap man and destroy his spiritual life. Such views about woman from a married person are, indeed, quite uncommon.

(vii) Kabir's World-view: The cosmological views of Kabir give a clear clue to his world-view. He finds Niranjana to be the creator of the world, Maya or woman. And this woman stands between man and God. She is there to entice him away from Him.

These views clearly affect Kabir's stand about the reality of the world and his consequent approach to it. He finds the world to be trap, a cleverly laid trap, from which escape has to be sought. This also explains Kabir's attitude towards woman, his stress on Ahimsa and his strong ascetic bias. All these features, involving virtual withdrawal from life, are common to all monastic or

ascetic religious systems.

Similarly, Kabir's goal of liberation from Maya and union with God as an end in itself, too, is otherworldly. For, Kabir, after his achievement, never took any initiative either to start a religious organisation or movement, or to accept any social responsibility. The inequality in the world he seems to ascribe to one's own acts. "To one man God has given silks and satin and a Niwar bed, others have not even a ragged coat or straw in the house to lie upon. Indulge not in envy or bickerings, O' my soul, do good deeds and gain their reward."⁸⁴ In this background, no wonder, Kabir never took any interest in the social or temporal affairs of his times. Obviously, such activity was not in line with his system. In the whole Bijak, there is hardly a categoric reference to God's Will working in the world. No doubt, Kabir calls all men to be the children of God, but it is equally true that for him the world is far from being a field of spiritual training and test. There is no direction for, much less emphasis on, carrying out the Will of God. Generally, his description of God is of one without Attributes and Absolute. Mystics who are disinclined to enter the social field generally describe God as Absolute and Attributeless.

Apart from the popular hymns of Kabir, most of them either deal with subjects that are abstract, esoteric or mystic, or are couched in a language that is seemingly paradoxical. Many of his hymns are in the form of riddles to be solved. In fact, Kabir is aware of it, because, at the end of some hymns, he invites persons to indicate their meaning, saying he who could understand them would be a master of religion.⁸⁵ It is undoubted that Kabir, like the Hinayana, addressed only an elite. His lack of interest in creating a separate religious movement is also obvious from the fact that he appointed no successor, and after him his disciples divided into Hindu Kabir-panthis and Muslim Kabir-panthis, each group owing allegiance to its own respective tradition as well.

Therefore, whether seen from the point of view of his goal, his approach to the world, his ideas about the reality of the world,

his attitude towards women, his insistence on Ahimsa and other factors mentioned above, it is apparent that Kabir holds the world-view of withdrawal from life.

4. NAM DEV

Nam Dev is another pioneer of the Radical Bhakti School. Though he appeared a century earlier than Kabir, his religious and social views are very much like those of Kabir. He unambiguously repudiates all the four fundamentals of Vaisnavism. Though in his devotional approach he is clearly a monotheist, he makes many pantheistic statements too, e.g. every thing is God; there is nothing but God; consider the world and God to be one; the foam and the water are not different. Chaturvedi writes: "Sant Namdev seemed to believe both in transcendence and immanence, in pantheism and non-dualism. His devotion was purely of the non-attributional absolute."⁸⁶ But, he also considers God to be immanent, everywhere in all hearts and the Creator of everything. Like Kabir and the Sufis, Namdev is very otherworldly. For he says, "The strength of contempt, of the world should be in the body an unchanging companion. One should lay aside differences between oneself and others, and feel no anxiety for things of the world."⁸⁷ Ranade also writes: "He (Namdev) tells us that it is impossible that the pursuit of God can be coupled with a life of Samsara. If it had been possible for a man to find God while he was pursuing Samsara, then Sanaka and others would not have grown mad after God. If it had been possible for him to see God while carrying on the duties of a householder, the great Suka would not have gone to the forest to seek God. Had it been possible for people to find God in their homes, they would not have left them to find out. Namdev has left all these things, and is approaching God in utter submission (Abhg. 83)."⁸⁸

Namdev's cosmogenic views are also orthodox. He says that God created Maya and "Maya is the name of the power that placeth man in the womb."⁸⁹ Indirectly, he is neither happy with the world, nor with the human birth. For him shop, shopkeeper,

men and everything are unreal excepting God.⁹⁰ In this background he seeks release from the world and suggests renunciation: "Nama gave up trade and devoted himself entirely to worship."⁹¹

The world being a play of Maya and not being a worthwhile field of spiritual endeavours. Namdev's goal is to have union with God through devotion and singing His praises. He says, "I perform worship, sing God's praises and meditate on Him for eight "Pahar" in a day"⁹² i.e. round the

6. WORLD-VIEW OF RADICAL BHAGATS

From the above description, let us draw some general conclusions about them. While, as seen by us, they are radically different from the Vaisnava Bhaktas, they are as a class equally distinct from the Sikh Gurus.

From the metaphysical point of view, Radical Bhakti is theistic, though the theistic picture is a little blurred, because at times pantheistic statements have also been made by the Bhagats. It cannot be denied that both in regard to their theism and the reality of the world their views are to an extent ambiguous. It is necessary to understand that ambiguities on these two issues are almost common to all quietist mystics, including Christian and Buddhist mystics and the Sufis, with which group they are nearest in their doctrines and practices. Pantheistic systems generally have two features. Their worldview is life-denying and the moral tone is weak since ever) thing is the working of the Basic Reality. Man being a part of Reality, the goal is a return to the original state, Godhead or Brahman which is Attributeless or Nirgun. In the Radical Bhakti, the moral sense is clear enough to denounce that inequalities of caste, but it is not strong enough to fight it: logical challenges. So the pantheistic streak in Radical Bhakt does make it indifferent to social interests and functioning.

In addition, the Radical Bhagats have two other characteristic features. Everyone of these saints had a clear otherworldly attitude. Secondly, none of them accepted any social

responsibility or started a movement, institution, or organisation in the religious field, much less in the social field. Ranade writes, "Mystics of this period show an all absorbing love of God, which would not allow a rightful performance of one's duties before God-absorption." "The conflict between a rightful performance of duty and all absorbing love of God has existed at all times and in a countries. But it seems the saints of this period were incline to lean in the latter rather than in the former direction and exhibited an all-absorbing character of God realisation. God indeed is an all-devourer, and it is from the examples of these saints that He devours also the performance of one's own natural duties."⁹⁴ Let us also quote a few relevant conclusions of Ray which he expressed regarding the radical saints, "I do not find any evidence to indicate that any of them ever attempted to institutionalise their faith and followers." "They had no other social purpose in view than to make better individuals from out of the groups that assembled around them. Their aim seems to have been the individual, not the society in any significant sense." "These leaders seem to have been individuals, working out for their own problems and towards achieving their personal religious and spiritual aims and aspirations."⁹⁵

It is, indeed, a glaring fact that the saints of Radical School felt no social interest or concern for the affairs of man. There is no evidence whatsoever that any of these saints initiated an activity or step in the social field. Like all quietist mystics, they led a solitary and otherworldly life, because it was their firm belief that temporal life was inconsistent with the religious path.

All this evidence makes it plain that the world-view of the Radical group was virtually of life negation since all of them led and recommended a life of withdrawal from the world and unconcern with the society in general. For them religious life was only a matter of personal concern and pursuit for union with God.

7. SAINTS AND NATHS

Let us examine if there is any affinity between Saints and Naths. Kabir is severely critical of most of the Nath practices and injunctions. He says, "With shaven head you sit swollen with pride, rings in your ears within a cave, your body you have besmeared with ashes, but within, you rob the house. In your village dwells a proud mendicant, filled with self, with pride and lust."⁹⁶ Naths are Saivites and Machhindernath and Gorakhnath are the founder Naths or the Nath Gurus. Kabir derides all of them. He rejected the ritualism, spells, blood sacrifices and horrid practices of Naths as inconsistent with his simple spiritual methods. "I was inclined neither towards Yoga nor towards Dhyana but I am certain that by Vairagya (renunciation) Maya cannot be discarded."⁹⁷ "Brahma, Siva and Sanaka know Him not. Recite the name of Ram."⁹⁸ Two points need to be kept in view in interpreting hymns of Kabir. When he refers to some of the Yogic methods of meditation, it does not mean that he accepts their adoption or system. He only means that the achievements claimed by the Yogis are achieved by him by his own methods of Bhakti. "I have smashed Siva and Sakti and have enlightened my soul with Sahaj of the thousand petalled Kamal."⁹⁹ This hymn is clearly derisive of Lord Siva who is the god with whom the Nath seeks final union of bliss. Secondly, in many cases the meaning of words used by Kabir is his own. With Naths 'Sahaj' means only a righteous temperament. Naths also used this term quite differently from its use by Siddhas, with whom Sahaj indicates natural abstinence and the medium through which they experience Maha-Sukha. But, for Kabir Sahaj means the final state of union with God through his own devotional systems.¹⁰⁰ So this caution is necessary while interpreting Kabir.

Kabir not only criticises all ascetic life, methodology and practices, but he almost ridicules Siva, the Lord of Naths, and Machhindernath and Gorakhnath, the two pioneers of the system. "Mahadev wasted his life with Uma." "Dead are Gorakh, Dattatreya." "Many Siddhs, Sanyasis and Gorakh found not the

end." "Brahma, Siva and Sanaka know Him not." "There was no Mahadeva." "Gorakh could not retain the breath for all his vaunted devices of devotion. By multiplying their mystic rites and ceremonies, they did not know Parbrahma." "Machhindernath was overwhelmed by Maya."¹⁰¹

In fact, Namdev is quite categoric in rejecting the Hath Yoga method of Naths when he says that he follows the path of Nam and disregards the Yoga of Ida, Pingla and Susmana. "I shall sing and imbibe the Name of God and achieve the highest stage; reject the methods of Ida, Pingla and Susmana, and of the union of the Sun and the Moon (as in Hath Yoga where the Sun represents Siva and the Moon Kundalini); I shall reach Him otherwise."¹⁰²

It would, indeed, be idle to suggest that mystics who reject the Nath methodology and who are quite derisive while describing the chief god, the pioneers or the gurus of the Naths, would in practice own or follow Hath Yoga or their system of methodology.



CHAPTER VIII

SIKHISM AND RADICAL BHAGATS: A COMPARISON

The common point between Sikhism and the Sants is their theism. It cannot be denied that, despite some of their pantheistic statements, the Sants are, broadly speaking, theistic. In their rejection of the fundamentals of Hinduism and their denouncement of the caste ideology of the Brahmanical society, the two systems, are quite similar. But, divergences start in regard to most of the remaining issues raised by us. The overall world-views presented by the two systems are wholly different.

The views of the Sants about the reality of the world are somewhat ambivalent. The Sants clearly led a life of withdrawal from the world and non-involvement in its affairs. For the Gurus, activity in the world is the measure of one's spiritual progress. For Kabir, the world is a snare. But, for the Gurus, "The world is in bloom like a garden." For them rejecting the world and its responsibilities is wrong, because it is the meaningful field of spiritual training. Activity therein alone shows whether or not a person has shed his egoism. Between the two systems, there is a fundamental contrast in their approach to the world. This basic difference explains the contrast in the goals, in the methodologies, in the roles of the superman, and the world-views of the two systems.

Whereas among the Sants, the goal is to have union with God as an end in itself, in Sikhism, the Gurmukh's objective is to carry out the Attributive Will of God in the world. In Sikhism man's assessment and his nearness to God depend on the deeds

of the seeker. But, in the Sant methodology, the emphasis is on singing the praises and love of God. Among the Sants, there has never been any social concern, much less social involvement in the problems of the community and humanity, since withdrawal from the main stream of society is a part of their methodology. As against it, in Sikhism, since God is the Protector of the weak and the helpless and Destroyer of the tyrant, the God-conscious person has a perpetual role to play in all fields of life. The result of all these differences is that, whereas the Sikh world-view is life affirming, that of the Sants is life-denying. Let us explain this point about life affirmation or activity.

In this context, it is fundamentally important to bear in mind how this thesis of life affirmation and activity was lived, what was its impact on society, and how it flowered. Guru Nanak's very first words, after his Enlightenment were, "There is no Hindu, no Musalman." For, without any distinction of creed or colour he saw only man everywhere, and his primary interest was in man alone. Of this principle of the brotherhood of man Gupta writes, "Like Rousseau, Nanak felt 250 years earlier that it was the common people who make the human race." The marvel is that this 'principle was proclaimed and practised in a society where for over two thousand years the divisive rigidity of the hierarchical caste had not only been strictly observed but the same had also received complete religious, ethical and social sanction. In furtherance of their thesis, the Gurus purposely organised and created an egalitarian society outside the social system governed by the caste ideology. No other religious or liberal movement, whether Buddhistic, Vaisnava, Saiva or of the Radical Bhagat, ever made an attempt in this direction; much less organise it. This calculated organisation and socio-political direction of the movement inevitably led to a clash with the establishment and the martyrdoms of the Gurus themselves and hundreds of their followers. For the first time in history there arose an idealistic revolution, a people's movement constituted by all sections of

society, but led by the so called lowest of them, including Kalals, Shudras and Ranghrettas. The deep significance of these features and the ethos that gave rise to them can be gauged from the fact that in 1947 when India won independence, the Prime Minister and the Chief Ministers of practically all the States belonged to the Brahmin caste. Again, the elan of this movement was such that it not only suffered and survived persistent attempts of the Mogul Empire to exterminate it, even by placing a price on the head of every Sikh, but it actually supplanted the very Empire that sought to uproot and destroy it. No wonder, Dr. Gupta calls this saga of martyrdoms, sacrifices and a successful struggle nothing short of a miracle. It is of this revolution that he says, "He (the Guru) thus enunciated a hundred years earlier the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity which formed the bedrock of French Revolution."

A question arises why there is such a contrast between the essentials and the activities of the two systems when both of them are theistic. This point takes us back to the issue raised by us initially, namely, the unity of perception, ideology and activity. In that regard, we came to the conclusion that the best clues to the ideology and basic perceptions of a religious system are its activities. Otherwise, simplistic or merely academic definition or classification of a religious system could be very misleading. Quietist mystic systems or theistic saints like the Sants have appeared in all times and in different countries. And, yet, none of them have ever shown social concern and responsibility as did the Sikh Gurus. It would, therefore, be very wrong to class both the activist and the quietist mystics in the same category, or to assert that the ideologies and perceptions of these two kinds of saints are the same, even though their activities in life are wholly divergent.

The answers of the Sants and the Sikh Gurus regarding most of the essentials of their religions being different, evidently the religious perceptions and experiences of the Sants and the Gurus are different. For obvious reasons, evidence on this issue can, by and large, be only inferential. However, before we examine

this issue further we shall consider the views of two mystics on this matter.

Abdul Qadus of Gangoh while referring to the active role of Prophet Mohammad said "Mohammad of Arabia ascended the highest heaven and returned. I swear by God that if I had reached that point I should never have returned."¹

It is no mere coincidence that centuries later, Baba Wasakha Singh, a Sikh Saint, emphasised the same point saying, "What kind of Bhagti is that in which one remains absorbed in one's meditations and the poor suffer all around us. This is not Bhagti. A Guru's Sikh must work and serve the poor."² In Sikhism the highest stage is not to remain enthralled in the mystic union, but, simultaneously, to work for the welfare of suffering humanity." The same point he stressed in different words, "You know how difficult it is for an ordinary person to give up the worldly pleasures and possessions and instead to follow the path of God. It is even more difficult for the Bhagat to come out of his intense and tranquil bliss in order to serve man and do the Will of God. But, brother, it is the highest kind of Bhakti to serve the poor and the down-trodden and yet remain in union with Him."³

Bergson, who has considered the issue from the point of view of philosophy, goes to the extent of saying that the religious experience of the quietist mystics, like Plotinus or Buddhists, is not full-fledged. According to him, complete mysticism inevitably involves "the establishment of a contact, consequently of a partial coincidence, with the creative effort which life itself manifests. This effort is of God, if it is not God himself. The great mystic is to be conceived as an individual being, .capable of transcending the limitations imposed on the species by its material nature, thus continuing and extending the divine action." He, therefore, considers Greek, Indian and Buddhist mysticisms to be incomplete because these give up activity. Plotinus, the Greek mystic, says that "action is a weakening of contemplation." But, in complete mysticism, after the union, the mystic soul yearns to become His (God's) instrument. "Now

it is God who is acting through the soul." The mystic is all activity. It is not now "the love of man for God, it is the love of God for all men" that works. It is this love which the mystic expresses in life. It coincides with "God's love for his hand-work." These mystics are the instruments of God so as to "lift humanity up to God and complete the divine creation so that it could reach its end." To such a God-conscious man the creation appears to be "God undertaking to create creators, so that he may have besides Himself, beings worthy of His love."⁴ The views of Hocking too are very similar. For him also, a Bhagat of the active kind "not only establishes a communion with God and develops a higher spiritual consciousness, but also becomes, in the domain of life the divine organising vehicle of the Transcendent Reality. In all humility he seeks to translate into activity the Will of God. This forms his continuing mission."⁵ Such has been the perpetual creative, constructive, and organising role of the Sikh Gurus.

Centuries before Bergson and Hocking defined activity or prophetic devotion to God and distinguished it from quietist devotion, the Sikh Gurus had not only clearly and emphatically expressed their views on the subject of their prophetic or activity religion, but they had actually lived according to the principles of active Bhakti laid down by them.

Another question arises as to why there should be such vast difference in the ideology and the activities of the two kinds of devotees or Bhagats of God. These difference; we feel, are entirely due to the difference in the perceptions of the two kinds of saints. Stace has collected a mass of evidence about the nature of the religious experiences, of numerous mystics and saints of the world, including those from India, the Middle East, Europe, England and Greece. He describes this experience as unitary, ineffable, paradoxical, blessed, blissful and tranquil. The entire evidence Stace has collected, relates to saints who in their lives were quietists. In his description, Stace does not mention love as being an element in the religious perceptions of those saints or mystics.⁶ Like Stace, William James had also recorded the nature

of religious experiences. He too does not mention love to be an essential part of that experience.

But Bergson considers love to be the chief ingredient of the mystic experience of the activity mystics. Let us see what the Guru says in this regard. "Friends, ask me what is the chief mark of the Lord. He is all Love, rest He is ineffable."⁷ For the Guru, the fundamental feature of the religious experience is love. That is why Guru Nanak says, "He who wants to play the game of love should come with his head on his palm,"⁸ "and Guru Gobind Singh declared, "Let everyone know that he alone is approved by the lord who loves."⁹ And love is dynamic, creative, cohesive, directive and virtuous. Such is also the Attributive Will of God. The Guru says, "He who knows His Will, must carry it out."

In Sikhism both the seeker and the Bhagat have to live the life of continuous activity for the service of man. With the quietist Bhagats, the position is entirely different both in theory and practice. Hence the wide differences between the two systems, their religious perceptions and their activities.



CHAPTER IX

SIKHISM, NATHISM, VAISNAVISM AND RADICAL BHAGATS : CONCLUSION

A few initial words of caution. Most of the religious systems, including Sikhism, assume that there is a level of Reality higher than the phenomenal world. The latter we experience with our senses. Empirical laws and the logic of cause and effect govern only the physical world. These are inapplicable to this Higher Reality which is Free. Its freedom only means that its working cannot be understood or explained by the laws and logic of the physical world. Some modern philosophies, especially the materialistic or mechanistic ones, do not accept the existence of a Higher Reality. For these Philosophies, everything, or every new development, is determined by a play and projection of the existing environmental forces. For the protagonists of such systems, nothing is new, novel, or emergent. The present is the product of the past, nothing is free. Under the impact of modern sciences, even the disciplines of economics, sociology, history, and psychology, by and large, accept materialistic philosophies. That is all right so far it goes. Every branch of knowledge may evolve its own system of interpretation and understanding. But it would hardly be rational to exclude the possibility of alternative interpretations, especially in the field of religion and its multifarious developments.

In a normal self-conscious psyche, experiences or perceptions of the environment lead to rational or reflective thought which forms the initial component of all planned or

purposive activity or history. In view of this modern trend to consider all thought and history, like the processes of nature, to be determined by the laws of causality, the explanation for all reflective or religious thought and historical activity is sought in the environment and its projections on the psyche of man; since all rational thought, apart from being intrinsically loyal to it, is deemed to be its subservient tool. Further, as human capacity to receive perceptions from the environment is both limited and selective, knowledge supplied by the world of matter and mind, or of matter, or mind is just tentative, or mere 'opinions' that are subject to review, revision, or change. Secondly, the laws governing the phenomenal world being fixed, these afford no scope or basis for spontaneity, free will, choice, or new ideas. And, if man has no freedom or choice and all his activities are necessary, the very basis for all moral life is knocked out. For in the processes and movement of nature there is no place for the moral or the ethical. Both Bergson¹ and Schweitzer,² find no trace of the ethical in the working of the world.

But the Sikh Gurus emphasize that the Neumenon or Naam, the Highest Reality, operates in the empirical world; in fact, the latter is dependent on the former. They describe Naam not only as the Ocean of virtues or values but also as "guru", the Teacher or Enlightener. And, the knowledge supplied by Naam is certain and authentic. Instead of giving rise to mere mechanical thought, it produces faith. But faith is not just 'belief or 'opinion.' It is erroneous to suggest that faith is devoid of the element of rational or reflective thought. Faith is the product of three elements, first, contribution from the Neumenon, second, perceptions from the physical world, and, third, rational or reflective thought. Hence its certitude, authenticity and impregnability, and, what is most important, is its moral base. Spiritual life is a world whose reality or very essence is its freedom, spontaneity or morality. And, moral life is purposive and directive; it seeks to bring the practice in harmony with the ideal. On this view, religion and history constitute a science

which studies free activity, something beyond the dominion of nature. Let us quote here the telling words of Collingwood³: "The discovery of a relation is at once the discovery of my thought as reaching God and of God's thought as reaching me: and, indistinguishable from this, the performance of an act of mine by which I establish a relation with God and an act of God's by which he establishes a relation with me. To fancy that religion lives either below or above the limits of reflective thought is fatally to misconceive either the nature of religion or the nature of reflective thought. It would be nearer the truth to say that in religion the life of reflection is concentrated in its intensest form, and that the special problems of theoretical and practical life all take their special forms by segregation out of the body of the religious consciousness, and retain their vitality only so far as they preserve their connexion with it and with each other in it."

The Gurus have emphatically said four things. First, that the message they convey emanates from a Higher Reality, and, second, that all the Gurus have been carrying out a single mission without the least deviation. The tenth Guru says, "Know that all the Gurus are one in spirit and carry out a common mission. Wise men know it. Fools do not understand it. No perfect imbibing of their message is possible without the full comprehension of this truth."⁴ They have also urged for two things more, a prayer for the gift of Naam and the desire to carry out His Will. That is also why, since Naam is the treasure of values, the Gurmukh is spontaneously moral and beneficent. And what is very important so far as the Sikh religion is concerned, this faith must give rise to constructive activity in the phenomenal world. Hence, in the case of Sikhism, a prophetic or activity religion as we call it, the clear emphasis is on moral and socio-political responsibility. It is on this basis that we have attempted to interpret the Sikh religion and distinguish it from the three other religious traditions dealt with by us. Therefore, in order to understand and interpret the Sikh religion, it is essential to study the history of the Sikh movement. For the

same reason, no understanding of the Sikh movement is possible, without a clear insight into the Sikh ideology.

Unfortunately, materialist philosophers, sometimes, while rejecting the basis of a Higher Reality, the phenomena of religious experiences, or emergent religions, dogmatically try, in their anxiety to prove the validity of their monolithic theories, to assess all the complicated and multifarious regions and aspects of life by a single hastily devised formula or measure. They try to explain all religious developments by a single line of events determined by a chain of actions and reactions. For example, Leuba, in his study of Christian mystics, crudely tries to ascribe the religious experiences and ecstasies of some saints to their disharmonious married lives. Similarly, Freud tried to view and interpret the dreams of everyone through the telescope of his own sexual theory. But, when Jung tried to turn the same telescope on Freud, he refused to divulge the connected details of his private life and dreams. And twice in his talks with Jung, when Freud felt his own ego had been injured or deflated, his only reaction was to enter into the shell of a swoon.⁵

In our view the study of religion or history involves the study of a free or purposeful activity. On the other hand, if religion and history are devoid of the contribution of free will, these remain a mere play of the logical or causal domination of environmental forces and necessary thought. A study based on such assumptions is apt to become a 'pseudo science' that would only raise 'unreal phantoms.'⁶

We, therefore, stress that religious systems and religious phenomena can be appropriately understood and appreciated only on the basis of their fundamentals and world views. To an extent, it is self-contradictory and anomalous to try to understand or interpret religions on the basis of mechanistic methods. Hence our digression and word of caution.

Our discussion reveals that the so called devotional systems may be divided into three clear-cut categories. To the first category belongs Vaisnavism and Nathism where devotion is purely formal

and confined mainly to image worship, or Yogic, meditational and ascetic practices. The value of ritualism is recognized. In the social field, the caste system forms the sanctified spiritual basis of man's social and moral ethics and duties; or the world is renounced and a monastic life of asceticism and celibacy is taken up. This system of devotion is fundamentally Indian and ancient since it has no indigenous parallel outside the country. The second devotional system is of men like Plotinus, Sufis, Christian mystics and saints like Kabir, Ravidas and Namdev. The history of this devotional system in India and outside it shows that saints of this group, while they accept the principle of human equality, resort primarily to a system of faith and meditation for spiritual attainments. They, as stated by Niharranjan Ray, work just as "individuals", purely for "their own salvation or personal, religious and spiritual aims and aspirations." Their love or devotion is directed towards God with the goal of union with Him as an end in itself. Here in the words of Ray, "there is absolute surrender as much to the Personal God as to the established social order." In this category, man's love of God does not move in the field of social concern, responsibility, or involvement. The methodology adopted is of meditation and interiority. In the third group, to use the inimitable words of Bergson, man's love of God is transformed into "God's love for all men." Here the sole religious path, both for the seeker and the superman, is through deeds prompted by the love of man and God's Attributive Will. Just as Vaisnavism falls in the first category, Sikhism belongs to the third category.

We have thus identified three distinct devotional systems unallied and independent in all their fundamentals and world views. Their activities are markedly different, because their ideologies are different; and their ideologies are different because their religious experiences or perceptions are different.

The Sikh Gurus played the game of love. Their final religious experience being of love, this explains their ideology of love and social activity. For love has four facets, it is dynamic; it is cohesive and unifying; it is directive; and above all, it is the

fount of all values and virtues. Following different religious experiences, the three Bhakti systems lay down different ideologies, leading to activities, the nature and fields of which are also equally different. It would, therefore, be both naive and ignorant to class these three contrasted religions into a single category of devotional system, Bhakti movement, or Nirgun Sampardaya.

In the earlier Indian traditions, the world is deemed to be a misery or Mithya and the spiritual value of Sanyasa, asceticism, celibacy and yogic methodology is recognized. "To steer clear of the esotericism and mysticism of austerities, self-mortification, and the general negativism of such cults and sects as those of Jain Sanyasis, of Nathpanthis, Aghorapanthis, Kapalikas and other kindered sects on the one hand, and of the orders of the emotionally-oriented and surcharged Vaisnavas of the Bhakti movement surrendering abjectly and absolutely as much to the Personal God as to the established social order, was not a very easy task in the context of the time and the space we are speaking of. But this is exactly what the Sikh gurus seem to have been aiming at and evidence at our disposal leaves no room for doubt that they succeeded to a very large extent in doing so.' "Neither the leaders of the Bhakti movement, nor of the Nathpanthis and the Sant synthesis, attempted to do what Guru Nanak did, not any systematic manner, at any rate. These leaders seem to have been individuals working out for their own problems and towards achieving their personal religious and spiritual aims and aspirations."⁸

The contrast, between the non-participation of the Naths, Sants and the Vaisnava saints in the socio-political field and the repeated entry and confrontation of the Sikh Gurus in defence and aid of righteous causes in this sphere, is not just incidental. The fact is that non-entry in one case and the acceptance of social responsibility in the other case are the compulsive consequences of the ideologies and objectives of the respective religious systems. The Sant tradition, Nathism, and Vaisnavism apart, purely devotional spiritual systems have appeared in all

ages the world over in Greece, Germany, France, Spain, England, Iran, and the Middle East. Nowhere the devotional mystics, whether Greek, European, Sufi or Indian have ever been involved in the social field as the Sikh Gurus did one after the other.

In Sikhism, to be a human-being is a very great privilege, since he has the glorious opportunity of not only knowing the truth, but also the more glorious responsibility of living it; of not only understanding the Creative Will, but also of carrying it out. For, God works, not through miracles but through man whose resources and capacity are enormous. Therefore, in Sikhism, the ideal is not to know the truth but to live truth. The realisation of truth is not an end in itself, but only means to the highest end of creative living, the latter alone being the correct test and index of the former. In fact, such an effort is not optional but obligatory, it being the sole measure of spirituality.

Applying the principle of the unity of perception, ideology, and activities, the basic contrast between the social and religious ideologies of the Sants, Naths and Vaisnavism on the one hand, and Sikhism, on the other, becomes all the more evident and conspicuous.

In the face of the historical background and the contrast between the quietism of these mystics referred above and the activism of the Sikh Gurus, it would just be idle to suggest that the ideology or the religious perceptions of the Sikh Gurus were in any manner akin to the ideologies and perceptions of the quietist religions. The contrast is too glaring to be glossed over. It would be equally idle to suggest the soil-seed theory, or the one of environmental development or religious growth. How could it be that while devotional but quietist religious systems and mystics have arisen in all ages, climes and countries, not even at one place has a quietist system been followed by an activist ideology or socio-political concern and involvement? It is too much to believe that nowhere the quietists were able to prepare the soil so as to enable the activist seed to sprout, or that no one ever arose to sow the activist seed there. Nor is the suggestion of growth or development understandable. For, in India, Saiva,

Yogic, Bhagvata and other devotional systems had existed side by side for over two thousand years, and yet never did any activist amalgam or growth take place. Facts and realities about the Sikh ideology and history are too obvious to be explained by such simplistic suggestions or conjectures.

The two classes of religions are entirely different in their approach and aims, their ideas and ideals, and their modes and methods of worship and working. In the traditional mystic systems, the goal is either to make room for the holy by the 'emptying of consciousness', or to reach the state of 'gnostic knowledge', through the internally isolating techniques of 'concentrated meditation'. But, in Sikhism, the Immanent (Naam) is the Ever-fresh Fount gushing forth into the universe. The human goal is to establish an intuitional or mystic link with this Never-ebbing Spring in order to be the humble but conscious vehicle of this Creative Flow of Love. The mystic's role is dynamic. The aim is not to merge in the Self-absorbed void. In the one group of systems, one rises towards the heavens to join the Transcendent. In Sikhism, one tries to bring the Transcendent to the earth. For, the Gurus emphasized that the Transcendent is Immanent too, deeply interested in His creation. It is in this perspective that we have to view and understand the message of Guru Nanak. Accordingly, we find that in the earlier Indian tradition there was not a trace of the fundamentals comprising the Sikh world-view. In all its basic doctrines, Sikhism is unconnected with that tradition, or the Yogic, Nath, Sant, or Vaisnava tradition. In Sikhism, at the time of Amrit or baptism, the Sikh gains five freedoms: (i) deliverance from the bonds and prejudices of all previous religions, customs and practices, (ii) obliteration of and deliverance from the effect of past deeds, (iii) freedom from the influence of the previous race, caste or family lineage, (iv) freedom from the stigma attached to a previous calling or a hereditary profession, and (v) deliverance from all previous rituals, prejudices and inhibitions.⁹

There is, thus, a complete break with the earlier ideologies

and religious goals and practices. Our conclusion is that far from being connected, the Naths, the Sant tradition and Vaisnavism, on the one hand, and Sikhism, on the other hand, being different in their fundamentals, ideologies, goals, methodologies and world-views, belong to two different categories of religious systems.

□

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